

MABEL GRAY



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OR

Cast on the Tide.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

ANONYMA—SKITTLES—INCOGNITA—THE SOILED DOVE—

ANNIE—AGNES WILLOUGHBY.

ETC. ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE SUPPER AT CREMORNE.

CREMORNE was crowded. Never had it looked more brilliant. The thousand additional lamps, which were the pride and the boast of old Vauxhall, may have been wanting; but lights glittered on every tree. The band was perfect. It being the height of the season, good, bad, and indifferent people were there; in the ring locomotion was difficult, yet the gay and giddy throng continued to promenade in a vicious circle, like horses turning a mill. The merry jest and the loud vacant laugh were heard on all sides. The bars were full, as well as the "room," the abode of the select, and the platform echoed to the feet of the indefatigable dancers.

In one of the "particular cabinets," looking out upon the lively scene, was a party of two—both

young men. They were about the same age. One was tall, handsome, aristocratic, fair, with blue eyes, short whiskers, and a delicate moustache. The other was shorter, dark, stout, having a face which denoted at one and the same time impudence and cunning. The former was Horace Brady. At nineteen he had entered the world, and having a fortune of three thousand a-year, he followed the bent of his inclination, and soon made himself notorious in that "half-world" where so many lose themselves at the outset of their career, shine brilliantly like a meteor for a time, and vanish suddenly, never to appear again; disappearing below the surface, and staying there. The other was well known in London society. Arthur Paveley had no money but that which his wits supplied him with. He was a good shot, a capital billiard-player, had a knack of putting a few pounds on winning horses, could always ingratiate himself with men beginning a fast career, got their bills discounted for them, played loo judiciously, belonged to one or two good clubs, and maintained a respectable appearance by skill and effrontery, and the virtue of his position, such as it was.

On the table stood a bottle of champagne. Both were drinking and smoking. Horace Brady's face wore a melancholy expression, and his friend in vain tried to rally him.

"I can't imagine how a fellow with three thou. a-year can give way to the blues as you have done to-night, Brady," exclaimed Arthur Paveley. "I wish I had it; I am only miserable when I have to go into a committee of ways and means."

"Perhaps you don't know that I have joined your division," answered Horace Brady, looking up.

"What is that?"

"The H.U."

"O, the hard-up division," said Arthur Paveley with a laugh. "Not you, old boy; you are too well off for anything of that sort."

"It is true, nevertheless. I sold my house in town this morning, and to-morrow week my horses go to the hammer at Tattersall's.

"You are joking!" exclaimed Arthur Paveley, with a somewhat grave and anxious expression upon his usually careless countenance.

"Very well; have it so, if you like."

"I shall be sorry, and will do what I can for you," answered Paveley, "when you do the Timon of Athens business, and call on your friends. It will be a bore, though, for I have taken a fancy to you. Ours is not a mere passing friendship."

"You will have to leech on to somebody else," said Horace Brady rather rudely.

"Don't be offensive," Arthur Paveley replied. "If you are, you must understand how to *dorer la pilule*; in other words, lend me that pony I asked you for till to-morrow, and I will forget that you were personal."

"I'm not in the giving vein, as King Richard says."

"I didn't ask you to give it me; I said, lend it."

"A distinction without a difference."

"Upon my word, Brady, if I thought that you intended to insult me I'd—but no; we're too good and

old friends for that to happen, I'm sure. The fact is, you are hipped, and you make me the victim of your ill-temper ; still, I am content to be the scapegoat. But touching that monkey—pony, I mean."

"Ask me later," replied Horace Brady, almost sharply ; adding immediately, "Do you think Patty will come?"

"Why shouldn't she? You telegraphed to her place, didn't you?" replied Paveley, biting his lips.

"Yes, hours ago. But she may have heard—"

"What?"

"That things are going wrong with me. These rumours get about, you know."

"By Jove, here she is!" was Paveley's answer, as the door of the room opened, and a pretty little woman, fashionably dressed, entered.

Patty Brooks, or "Shoes," as her intimate friends called her—nobody exactly knew why—was three-and-twenty, or thereabouts, in the zenith of her beauty, and with her powers of fascination unimpaired, though she had, as she would have told you, "been about" for the last five years.

Very fair, she had the most lustrous blue eyes it is possible to imagine, and the prettiest mouth that ever bestowed sweet kisses upon favoured mortals.

"Am I late?" she asked, taking a seat which Horace Brady offered her.

"Better late than never," he rejoined.

Supper was ordered, and speedily brought in. The champagne flowed briskly, yet Brady's spirits did not rise. At length he exclaimed,

"I am in the humour to philosophise to-night."

"Don't do that," replied Patty, laughing. "I once knew a man who was a philosopher, and he was the most odious, hard-hearted wretch in the world. I told him I would never speak to him again when he offended me; and he answered that he did not care, because he was a philosopher; and when I left him he did not trouble his head about me a bit. I have hated philosophers ever since."

"My dear Shoes," said Brady, "you are garrulous. Let me beg that you will check this loquacious tendency; I have a question to ask Paveley."

"To ask me?" said the young man.

"Yes. What is friendship?"

"Let me see. Friendship is to have but one purse, one sword, one pen, an identity of interest on all occasions—especially when you can't take up a bill and have to renew it—to love two women, and never poach on each other's preserves."

"Excellent! I like your definition, Paveley. Are you my friend?"

"I hope so."

"Are you not sure of the fact?"

"Of course I am."

"Then you are my friend?"

"To the death."

"I am obliged to you.—Now, Patty, it is your turn," said Horace Brady with a smile.

"What am I to do?" asked Shoes.

"You are to do nothing; but you may indulge in your favourite occupation of talking. Tell me, queen of my heart, what is love?"

Patty Brooks thought a moment.

"I have it !" she cried. "Love is to have two mouths which unite in a kiss, two hearts which beat only for one another, two breaths which mingle, two souls which are full of happiness occasioned by the same instinct, the instinct being love, as distinct from passion."

"Capital !" exclaimed Brady ; "Jean Jacques Rousseau could not have defined it more truly, or more to my satisfaction. And you, my pet, do you love me ?"

"God knows I do, Horace ; can you doubt it ?"

"I had my doubts both about your love and Paveley's friendship. I am indeed a happy man to be so blessed. What care I for the world and its misfortunes since I am sure of a woman's love and a man's friendship ? I feel that I can defy Fate."

"I love you," Patty murmured softly.

He bent over and kissed her tenderly.

"I am your brother," said Paveley.

He leant forward and wrung his hand.

"Now," he exclaimed, "I am going to take you both into my confidence. In the first place, I am ruined."

Patty looked grave.

"Let me ask you a question," she said. "Can a man who has run through his money be indicted for defacing the coin of the realm ?"

A sickly smile played around the corners of the young man's handsome mouth.

"My landed property," he observed, "is reduced to the earth in the flower-pots outside my windows."

"But your estate in the country?" asked the woman.

"I never had one."

"Your town-house?"

"Is sold."

"Your horses and carriages?"

"Are sent to Tattersall's under a bill of sale."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Patty blankly.

"It is a melancholy fact. But what matters? You will stick to me in storm as well as in sunshine. Listen; you shall hear my history. I never knew my father or mother, nor am I sure that my real name is Horace Brady. I was sent to Eton at an early age, and a gentleman named Brady paid the bills for me, occasionally coming to see me. The recollections of my infancy are confined to an old country-house, and a stern woman who treated me unkindly. She was probably the housekeeper. I matriculated at Oxford, but growing tired of study, I did not graduate; and after an interview with Mr. Brady, a bachelor who lived in a small house in Brook-street, Grosvenor-square, I plunged into a life of dissipation, as you know, my friends, upon an income of 3000*l.* a-year, paid to my agents quarterly by Mr. Brady. This lasted for a few years. Last month Mr. Brady died; his executors have no orders to continue the income, and, with the exception of a few hundreds I have left, I am destitute. My protector, who told me again and again that I was no relation of his, died of apoplexy, and left no will. I am told that a brother will inherit everything. That is just my position."

Shoes lowered her eyes on the plate.

Paveley drank a glass of wine at a draught, and exclaimed,

"Then you were not joking when you said that you were ruined."

"Joking?"

"Yes."

"I am incapable of joking upon such a subject," replied Horace sadly.

"What will you do?"

"I have not made up my mind yet. Fortunately, I am well educated; I have a certain manner, and can talk several languages."

"Better know how to play a good game of billiards. There is nothing for you in this country; you must go to America. If you stay here you will get worse and worse, until you are obliged to cadge a few pence to get a Bohemian glass—gin-and-water, you know."

Horace trembled.

There was something ominous in this reply.

"My means won't allow me to keep you," continued Arthur Paveley, with a coarse and callous brutality which pierced the other to the heart. "We should both become beggars; and, great as my regard is for you, old fellow, it is as well to say at once that you are a luxury I can't afford. Fancy yourself living in a garret, making thirty shillings a-week as a City clerk; that's about your line."

Horace sighed profoundly.

He turned to Patty.

"There is a great deal of truth in what Paveley

says, and I am wrong, perhaps, to be shocked at it," he exclaimed. "It is in America that rapid fortunes are made. I will go over to the United States with what little capital I can rake up, start in trade, and recuperate—that's the word, is it not?—my shattered finances. You, dearest Patty, will accompany me. We shall cheer each other in the days of our poverty, and lighten the clouds which at present surround us. Abroad we will gradually build up the edifice of a colossal fortune. With you by my side to urge me to increased exertions, I am capable of anything and everything. Westward ho, my Patty!"

He extended his hand to Shoes, who did not respond to his impassioned and ardent address.

Horace became ghastly pale.

"What !" he said ; "do you not love me?"

His lips quivered and his limbs trembled, as if with a sudden attack of the palsy.

"You know I love you," she replied coldly ; "but you must be mad to dream of going abroad, and still more so to think that I should accompany you. Ten years would be a short time for you to make a fortune in, even if you were successful in trade, which is very doubtful, as you have not been brought up to commerce. In ten years I shall be an old woman, and I could not put up with privations of any sort. I have not been accustomed to poverty, and have acquired habits of luxury and ease which I cannot get out of. I should die if I lived with a poor man. I can't walk ; I can't work ; and I like being expensively and fashionably dressed."

While talking thus, Patty Brooks scratched the

table-cloth restlessly with the claw of a lobster, but did not raise her eyes to those of the ruined man.

“God help me!” cried Horace Brady, as the truth burst upon him; “you are both time-servers. It is the old, old story: no longer pipe, no longer dance. I have no friend, no one’s love. My ruin is more final than I thought it was.”

Overcome by bitter reflections, Horace sank back on his seat, his eyes closed, his arm dropped and hung listlessly by his side, his lips parted, he glided gently into a corner, and appeared to have fainted away.

CHAPTER II

MEPHISTOPHELES.

HORACE BRADY had actually fainted.

The shock to his nervous system was too great to be withstood, and he succumbed before the ill-concealed heartlessness of his mistress and his friend.

How long he remained insensible he did not know, but when he came to himself, he found a man standing near, and throwing iced water into his face.

The music was still playing, and the revelling in the grounds amounted to a perfect carnival.

This external mirth contrasted strangely with his wretchedness. His first care was to cast his eyes about to see if Patty and Arthur Paveley had deserted him.

They were gone.

Finding that he was utterly ruined, and not likely to be of any service to them in the future, they left him to his fate. The man who had restored him to consciousness was tall, very dark, having short curly hair black as a raven's plume, and a swarthy complexion, such as you behold in the gallant Spanish hidalgos who lord it on the Prado of Madrid. His eyes were small, piercing, and cruel, but they burned within cavernous recesses like live coals; his nose was

slightly bowed, like those of the Romans ; his mouth wide, and hard at the corners ; his cheeks inclined to be hollow, if not cadaverous ; his teeth white and glistening ; and he was in evening dress. His studs were three small Nuremburg eggs, containing fanciful groupings of the Holy Family, infinitely more valuable than diamonds which he had bought at Pyke's in Bond-street ; his watch-chain a series of exquisite mosaic links. In his manner and his face there was a terrible something which it was difficult, if not impossible, to fathom. A something devilish and inexplicable, which made the physiognomist tremble, and the indifferent observer chill to the bone.

As Horace Brady was recovering, a waiter entered the cabinet and laid the bill on the table, looking from one to the other curiously.

The unknown glanced carelessly at the bill, which amounted to four pounds and a few shillings, then putting his hand in his pocket, he drew out a bundle of notes and some sovereigns. Detaching one note from the rest, which was for five pounds, he threw it, all crumpled as it was, towards the waiter, saying,

“ Keep the change, and go.”

The man did not require to be told twice ; he went at once, shutting the door behind him, and the stranger bestowed his attention once more upon Horace Brady.

“ I have to apologise for my presence here,” said the stranger, with one of his peculiar smiles ; “ but the fact is, I was in the adjoining cabinet, and hearing as I thought a fall, I hastened to render what assistance I could.”

"Where is Patty?" murmured Horace.

"She went away on the arm of your friend Paveley."

"How do you know my 'friend's' name?" asked Horace, with a sarcastic emphasis on the word "friend."

"The walls are thin; I could not help overhearing your conversation," replied the unknown.

"Did you hear all?"

"Every word. It is perhaps an incautious admission to make; but I grew interested in you, because, as soon as I heard your name, I was satisfied that I knew your father."

"My father?" repeated Horace, in a voice that trembled with emotion.

"I am sure of it."

"Who are you, if I may ask?"

"Be content to know me as Major Rastock."

"In the Queen's service?"

"No, I hold a foreign commission. Suffice it to say that I have served, and in the field."

"You are now resident in London?"

"It would seem so, as I am here; but I am a cosmopolite. I inhabit all cities. I am here to-day and gone to-morrow. Next week you might meet me in Paris, *en route* for Vienna, and in less than a month I might be driving in the Central Park in New York."

Horace regarded this singular being with unfeigned astonishment.

"At present," continued Major Rastock, "you are the hero of a romance."

Horace groaned.

"You are ruined, after a brief and brilliant career, and not through any fault of your own. You have lost your friend and your mistress. But one thing can bring them back in penitence to your feet."

"And that is?"

"Gold."

"You are right. But tell me, Major," said Horace, sitting up and drinking some wine, "is it worth while to buy love and friendship?"

"Love and friendship, my good sir," returned Major Rastock, "do not exist in reality. They are abstractions, toys for the poetical mind. If you want the semblance of either the one or the other, depend on my word that you must buy it. The clever man knows this, and he purchases those staple commodities which all the markets of society abound with, but he does so at the cheapest rate possible."

"The truth is very dreary."

"Nevertheless, truth, by which you mean experience, must be gained by all who live in this world. Drink; there is nothing like sparkling wine to raise the drooping spirits of the crushed and wounded in the battle of life."

Horace drank deeply.

"How am I to get the gold which will restore me to happiness?" he asked.

"I will tell you; but we must proceed gradually. You are ignorant of all matters connected with your birth; is it not so?"

"Unhappily I am."

"Yet you have seen your father."

"Mr. Brady? Is it possible that he, after all, was my father?" cried Horace anxiously.

"He was your father," replied Major Rastock; "and he died worth ten thousand a-year."

"Then it is as I feared, I was not born in wedlock," said Horace, with a despairing air, as the crimson tide of shame rushed into his face.

"You are wrong."

"Heaven be thanked!" cried the young man, clasping his hands joyously together.

"Your mother," continued Major Rastock, "was a lady of rank, and your father married her privately. You were the only offspring of their union. Shortly after your birth, Mr. Brady discovered that your mother was unfaithful to him. He at once broke off the connection, repudiated the marriage, and took steps to obliterate all proofs of it. Nevertheless, the proofs existed, and he took the documents necessary to establish your legitimacy abroad with him, where he remained ten years. On his return, your mother was dead of a broken heart."

"My poor mother!" sobbed Horace Brady, overcome.

"Mr. Brady would not acknowledge you as his son, though he treated you with the utmost liberality, as you know."

"The proofs?"

"Of your legitimacy?"

"Yes; where are they?" replied Horace.

"The whole of your father's property has passed into the hands of his brother, and these documents are, with others, in his possession."

"Let us get them at once, Major. I will reward you liberally!" cried the young man, growing wild with excitement at the prospect of being rich once more, and with his mind inflamed at what he had heard.

In truth, it was an extraordinary tale.

Major Rastock smiled a Mephistophelean smile.

"Not so fast, my young friend!" he exclaimed.

Horace Brady's countenance fell again.

He began to comprehend that there were difficulties in the way.

"You are entitled to ten thousand a-year," the Major went on.

"So you informed me."

"This large sum is partly invested in the Funds, partly in land. The two amounts are equal. If I assist you to get your inheritance, you must be content to let me have the land as my share."

"But—"

"Is not the cupidity of the human heart extraordinary!" interrupted Rastock, in the same equable tone of voice in which he always spoke. "Here is a man without a penny, destitute, not having a feather to fly with. I inform him how to get five thousand a-year, and he murmurs."

"I am sorry," replied Horace in a low tone; "it is just that you should have half. Tell me how I am to secure this fortune to you, and in what way we shall get it."

"Your uncle is a miser. He would rather part with his life than with a halfpenny of that which he has just acquired, though he does not want it."

"Does he know of the documents which will prove my title to the property?"

"He does, but he has not yet had time to find them, though he intends every day to make a search, knowing that they are among his brother's papers, which he has carefully collected," replied Major Rastock.

"When he does find them he will destroy them."

"Infallibly."

"How do you know all this?" asked Horace, a feeling of terror for which he could not account creeping over him.

"I can read the mind, and having been acquainted with your father—"

"Ah, that explains it!" said Horace, not wishing to appear rudely inquisitive.

The same smile—so profound, so significant of meaning, which Horace had observed before—appeared upon the Major's face.

"From what I have told you," he continued, "it is easy to see that we have a difficult task before us."

"What are we to do?" Horace inquired in perplexity.

"That is the point all practical men wish to come to. Now that we understand one another, we can approach business."

"Yes, to business," said Horace, who was carried away by the force of this man's manner.

"The uncle, Antonio Brady, must be removed."

"Removed!" repeated Horace, as if he did not quite understand the word.

“ Not vulgarly knocked on the head, but slowly destroyed by a subtle vegetable poison which leaves no trace, and which I can supply you with,” said Major Rastock, whose eyes seemed at that moment to burn into the young man’s very soul.

Horace became pale.

His mind, for a moment abstracted from the scene, revisited the school of his youth. He remembered the lessons of honour which had there been inculcated in his mind, and he fancied that he heard the chapel-organ pealing forth the glorious strains of the *Veni Creator*.

Major Rastock watched him closely.

Finding that he made no reply, he touched him sharply on the shoulder.

Horace Brady started.

“ Major,” he exclaimed, “ let me tell you a dream which I had last night.”

“ A dream ?”

“ Yes ; it has its application.”

“ I am listening,” returned the Major.

“ I dreamt that I was in a far-off country, wandering in the woods, when suddenly a long, lithe, hideous black snake fastened round my body. Instantly I grappled with it, seizing its head, which, by the aid of a knife I had with me, I succeeded in cutting off. A fire, which some wanderer like myself had left, was smouldering near. I cast the loathsome head upon it, and heard the flesh hiss and crackle in the flame. The coils relaxed, the disgusting body fell to the ground, and I trampled it beneath my feet.”

His voice, while speaking, rose to an eloquent pitch, but the Mephistophelean smile still hovered about the corners of the Major's lips.

"I don't quite see the application," he replied.

"You say you knew my father?" continued the young man.

"I had that honour."

"What did you find him to be during your acquaintance with him?"

"In what way do you mean?"

"Was he upright and just in all his dealings with those with whom he came in contact?"

"Yes."

"Would he have stooped to a low or dirty action?"

"No," replied the Major.

"He would not?"

"Certainly not."

"In fact, he was a gentleman?" continued Horace.

"In word and deed; and he would have done nothing wrong. I can give you that satisfaction."

"Neither will I, his son, condescend to mix myself up in your low intrigues, Major Rastock," said Horace with flashing eyes, and speaking in a loud voice. "Are you aware, sir, that you have proposed the commission of a crime to me?"

"Perfectly aware," replied the Major, with his habitual composure.

"It is murder—cool, deliberate murder."

"That is the word."

"And you dare to insult me by—"

"My good fellow," interrupted Major Rastock, "you are very young. You are only a child, after all, and you have not a proper understanding of the meaning of words. I thought we might come to an arrangement which would be mutually advantageous to us. You seem to prefer poverty to affluence."

"Yes, on your terms," indignantly replied Horace.

"Let it be so. If you like poverty, it is a matter of the most perfect indifference to me."

"Leave my presence, sir !" shouted Horace.

"You need not raise your voice, and speak as if you were the Prince of Wales. I have no wish to stay with you, for your conversation is not too entertaining. Your supper-bill is paid."

"By whom ?"

"By me."

"This liberty—"

"You will find extremely convenient, as Miss Brooks thought fit to take your purse with her," replied the Major, with a smile.

Horace searched his pockets, and found that the Major had spoken the truth.

Handing him a card, Major Rastock said,

"If you will call at this address, and say you want to see me, I will keep any appointment you like to make within one month from the date of your call. If I am in town you can see me at once ; but I must have time to get from St. Petersburg or the States here."

Horace took the card mechanically.

On it was printed :

MAJOR RASTOCK.

Albany.

“What is this for?” he asked.

“You may change your mind.”

“Never !”

“You do not know,” said the Major, disregarding the emphatic negative ; “it is disagreeable to be poor. When you have had some experience of the humanity of the world you will sigh for wealth. Then—and not before—seek me. We will resume our conversation of this evening. I have the honour to wish you good-night.”

Major Rastock lifted his hat politely, and took his departure, leaving Horace overwhelmed with astonishment.

It all resembled a dream.

A hideous and ghastly nightmare.

In time the music ceased, the lights were extinguished, and only a few people remained in the room, who were gradually got rid of through the water-gate, or the entrance near the river.

Horace was roused by the cessation of the merriment, and he too went home.

His home was an hotel ; and as he laid his head upon his pillow that night, he wondered how long he would have a home, and if he would not soon be obliged to herd with those who filled the night-refuges and the casual-wards.

For a few days more he was seen about as usual. Then he vanished.

No one knew whither he had fled.

Patty and Arthur Paveley met one night at the Café Riche, and the woman asked him if he had seen Brady.

"No," he answered. "They know nothing of him at Long's, where he was staying. Some say the poor devil is gone to America, as he told us he should; others say he was seen at Jacquy's in Boulogne, playing billiards the night before last."

"At all events, he has vanished from our festive scene."

"That is a moral certainty and an actual fact."

"Has he paid his debts?"

"I can't say. I believe there are some writs out against him; but it is really a matter with which I don't trouble my head. Have you seen Prittivale?"

"No; who is Prittivale?" asked Patty.

"He is the new plunger. Lord Prittivale is two-and-twenty, and has a hundred thousand a-year. I knew him at Oxford."

"O, do introduce me! Will you, can you?" cried Patty eagerly.

"Be a good child, and perhaps I will. Don't jump down his throat—he is peculiar. Let's have some fiz.—Waiter! a bottle of Roederer."

Patty sat down by his side, and favoured him with one of her most gracious smiles, as he took a cigar from a handsome case ornamented with his crest and monogram, and began to smoke.

CHAPTER III.

THOUGHT OF AT LAST.

IN a quiet, unromantic, almost dreary street in Boulogne-sur-Mer was, a few years ago, a young ladies' school.

It was a good school of its kind, and numbered about five-and-thirty boarders, the odd five being English girls, the remainder French. The French to a woman were Catholics; the English Protestants, and the latter were to some extent driven to associate together. Among the English was a girl named Mabel Gray.

This girl had been placed there at ten years of age, and was only sixteen at the time we introduce her to the reader. She was of the average height, with a wealth of light-brown hair. A quiet manner gave almost a sedate expression to her full, handsome countenance; her eyes were full and round, her cheeks rosy, her chin dimpled; and there was nothing more extraordinary about her than there was about the generality of girls of her age, except that her eyes were eloquent, and she could talk with them, even when her mouth was closed.

She had been brought over to Boulogne by an old lady, who had settled down in Brecquereque, living in

cheap lodgings, and economising as people can abroad, where they can indulge in little savings of which they would be ashamed at home.

Mrs. Chaplin, as she was named, had been Mabel's nurse, and was associated with all the recollections of her infancy. Her mother she could not remember at all, but her father was often present before her as a tall, handsome man, his hair dark and flowing, well-dressed, agreeable in his manner, evidently the pet of certain circles—of any society, in fact, though it was to be feared he did not favour the most virtuous with much of his company.

The summer vacation, which began in June, was about to commence, and Madame Landry, who had not received any money for the last year towards Mabel's school-bills, sent for Mrs. Chaplin.

Mrs. Chaplin came, and was ushered into the drawing-room, where Madame Landry, a hard-featured, mercenary Frenchwoman, awaited her.

They had a long conversation respecting Mabel, and Madame Landry was determined that, unless she was paid, Mabel should remain no longer.

Mrs. Chaplin replied that she would write to England, and that she would visit the schoolmistress again as soon as she received an answer.

A week elapsed without bringing any news.

Then a letter came from Mr. Anthony Granville Gray, containing an order upon a well-known banker in the Rue Napoléon for more than a hundred pounds.

In the letter he said: "Send the girl over to me at once. I find on inquiry that the boat starts for London-bridge at nine o'clock at night. Let her go

by that, and I will meet her at the Terminus Hotel, London-bridge, in the coffee-room, at two the next day. If Mabel does not remember my face, she must ask the waiters for me, as I am known there."

Mrs. Chaplin went over to the school at once, and showed Madame Landry the letter and the order, which was promptly cashed, the bills settled; and Mrs. Chaplin handed twenty-five pounds over to her young friend as soon as she entered the room, saying,

"That money is for you to go to England with, though what you will do with so much I don't know. Your father has sent for you, and wishes you to start by the boat to-night. There is his letter, my dear."

This information quite overwhelmed Mabel, who had not enjoyed a holiday for six years, unless it was a few hours at Brecquereque with Mrs. Chaplin.

She put the money down on the table, and eagerly devoured the letter.

"Am I to leave school altogether?" she asked.

"I cannot tell," replied Mrs. Chaplin. "That letter is thoroughly characteristic of your father—hurried and disconnected; he explains nothing."

"But I am to go?" said Mabel, her eyes sparkling with delight.

"O yes."

"There is no doubt about that?"

"None," said Madame Landry drily.

Madame was satisfied, insomuch as she had received the money that was due to her; but she feared that she had been over-hasty in saying that the girl should not stop, and feared that she might not return.

"You will come back in two months, will you not, dear?" she exclaimed in French. "I can give you that time, but no longer."

"That depends upon my father," answered Mabel.

"Would you not be glad to come back to me?"

"I cannot say that it would realise my idea of happiness," answered Mabel, who could not resist the temptation of saying something unpleasant to the schoolmistress now that the opportunity presented itself.

"What ingratitude, after my kindness to you!" she said.

"Put your money in your pocket," said Mrs. Chaplin.

"I do not want it all. Take what you like of it, dear Mrs. Chaplin," replied Mabel.

"God forbid that I should touch a halfpenny of it!" answered Mrs. Chaplin. "No, no; I have received favours from your father in the past, and he has seen that I shall not want in my old age."

"Shall I take care of it for you?" inquired Madame Landry, with an insinuating smile.

Mabel hesitated.

Mrs. Chaplin put an end to her vacillation by placing it in her pocket, saying coldly,

"Do not trouble yourself, madame. I will mind it for her till she is on the boat, and then she can have it."

Madame Landry shrugged her shoulders, and her eyes flashed with a vindictive fire.

The day was passed in packing-up, making a few

necessary purchases, and in leave-taking, for Mabel had contracted a few friendships in the school and in the town.

Mrs. Chaplin accompanied Mabel in a carriage to the quay an hour before the advertised time for the starting of the boat, and saw that she had a comfortable berth in the ladies' cabin.

Then she kissed her tenderly, saying,

"God bless you, my dear child ! He alone knows whether I shall ever see you again. But should you want me, I will always fly to your side, if you write to me. Your father is a peculiar man. I don't know whether you will be happy with him."

"Do you remember my mother?" asked Mabel.

She had put the same question to the old woman twenty times without receiving any information. Generally she was met with a shake of the head or a flat reply in the negative.

"No, my dear. I have told you before that I never saw her," said Mrs. Chaplin.

"Is she dead?"

"I believe so."

"I must have been very young when she died, as I do not remember her."

In this sort of conversation the time was passed until the boat's bell rang for starting.

"Heaven guard you, my sweet child !" said Mrs. Chaplin, kissing her again.

Making her promise to write soon to her, and giving the stewardess a gratuity to take care of her, the old lady, having previously handed her the money

she had taken possession of in the morning, took her leave, went on shore, and the boat started.

Mabel was soon in a profound slumber, and did not wake till daylight, when she dressed herself and went on deck, finding that the ship was in the Downs and steaming up towards the mouth of the Thames.

It was a lovely summer morning, and the sea was as smooth as glass ; scarcely a ripple disturbed its surface. Mabel walked up and down the deck, enjoying the fresh air, the beautiful cliffs, and the towns nestling in the bays at intervals along the coast.

Never had she in her whole existence experienced such a delicious sensation of freedom as she then did. No slave emancipated from galling thralldom could have felt a more lively satisfaction or a purer happiness.

It is true that she was about to enter the world, and brave the perils which beset all those who take an active part in everyday life.

To the young, however, all is roseate ; there are no such things as difficulties, troubles, cares. They enter the battle full of spirit, courage, and determination to win the goal, which is happiness and contentment.

While she was indulging in pleasant anticipation of what was in store for her when under her father's care, Mabel was conscious of an admiring glance fixed upon her by a man who was also pacing the deck. Her eye had not caught his, but her woman's instinct told her that she was being looked at, and the crimson tide rushed to her face.

He was a handsome man, though his gaze was

that of a libertine, and his appearance generally that of a man accustomed to dissipated courses.

Stopping in front of her, so that she could not pass him, he addressed her, saying,

"What a charming morning, is it not? I cannot sufficiently praise your good taste in being up and about so early."

Mabel looked up and saw the man whom we have described, who was dressed in travelling-costume, and had a Scotch plaid wrapped round his breast and shoulders in that peculiar fashion which must require a long apprenticeship to learn.

Looking at him timidly, she made an effort to pass him, but finding she could not conveniently do so she turned abruptly round and walked away.

He was by her side in a moment.

"I hope I have not frightened you?" he said.

"Not at all," she answered boldly.

"Why, then, do you avoid me?"

"Because you have offended me."

"In what way?"

"I am not in the habit of holding any sort of conversation with gentlemen with whom I am unacquainted," replied Mabel.

The stranger smiled.

"O," he said, "you admit that I am a gentleman?"

"I merely gave you a title of courtesy, and if you want my true and conscientious opinion, I should say you were the exact reverse."

"Of what?"

"Of a gentleman."

"Why?" he asked, with a puzzled expression.

"Because gentlemen do not usually inflict their presence upon a lady when they are given distinctly to understand that it is undesirable."

"Are you a lady?" he said, rather nettled. "I took you for a maid travelling with some family."

Mabel Gray's eyes flashed.

Regarding him without the slightest nervousness this time, she said,

"It is a consolation to me to know that my estimation of your character is a fit one. No gentleman would behave as you are behaving."

"What am I, then?" he demanded.

"You wish me to tell you?"

"Yes, or I should not have asked you."

"A low blackguard, whose principal occupation in life seems to be to insult ladies who have no one to protect them."

"A very spirited reply, by Jove!" said the stranger, smiling. "We must know one another better, and then I hope you will have occasion to modify your harsh opinion of me."

"Never. I beg that you will leave me. If I am annoyed any farther, I shall make a complaint to the captain."

"The captain, my dear child, has no authority over me," the man replied, with a provoking calmness.

"Will you cease annoying me, sir?" cried Mabel.

"Sit down, and let us talk quietly, and—"

A young man who had just come on deck was walking by. Mabel espied him, and exclaimed,

"May I claim your kind protection, sir?"

He crossed over at once.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" he asked, raising his hat politely.

"This person," said Mabel, "is annoying me in the most gross manner, and no remonstrance of mine has any effect upon him."

She pointed to the stranger.

The two men looked at one another.

"You hear what this lady says, my lord," exclaimed the young man. "You and I know one another, and I think you know me well enough to be aware that if I say I will throw you into the sea I will keep my word."

"It would be better for the girl to know me than one of the knocked-out members like yourself," answered the man addressed as "my lord."

"Begone at once! If you dare to say another word, by Heaven I'll make you regret it, though I should be sorry to use violence in the presence of a lady," said the young man.

His lordship looked contemptuously at him, and turning on his heel, walked away.

Mabel thanked her protector in the warmest terms.

"May I ask," she said, "to whom I am indebted for what I may call a timely rescue?"

"Certainly. My name is Horace Brady," he answered.

"And that man?"

"Is Lord George Lumley, one of the biggest blackguards in London. He fears neither God nor

man; but we have met, and tried conclusions before, so he knows what he has to expect from me."

They sat down together on a seat on the after-deck, and Horace Brady, who was a trifle thinner and paler since we saw him last, offered her a coat which he had on his arm to put over her shoulders.

"Thank you, no," she answered. "I am not in the least cold."

"I thought the morning air might be chilly," he said.

"It is rude of me," she continued; "but may I ask why Lord Lumley called you a 'knocked-out member'?"

A bitter smile crossed Horace's countenance.

"Would you like to know?" he asked in a sad voice.

"If the explanation would not pain or be unpleasant to you."

"O no, I am growing very much like granite. You must know that a few years ago I entered the world *sans souci*, and, if I may be pardoned the joke, I have left fashionable society *sans six sous*."

"Indeed! How is that?"

"It is easily explained. My father, who made me a liberal allowance, died suddenly, and all his property has gone to my uncle. I owe a little money in London. I cannot pay it at present, and perhaps his lordship was justified in applying to me that epithet which aroused your curiosity. A 'knocked-out member' means one who cannot pay his debts, and is posted in consequence. That is not exactly my case,

for I owe nothing on the turf; but it is not worth while to cavil at terms."

"Why do you return to London?"

"Because I wish to act boldly, and look things in the face. It is no use skulking abroad, especially when—"

He paused abruptly.

He was going to say, "when you have no money." But he did not like to humble his pride sufficiently to make this deplorable admission to his new acquaintance.

"Have you been away long?"

"O, no; a few weeks, that is all; and I went more for change of air than to escape from creditors."

"It is only fair now," said Mabel, "that I should tell you who I am."

"I shall be very proud of your confidence," he answered.

"My name is Mabel Gray, and I am the daughter of Mr. Granville Gray."

"Bless me!" exclaimed Horace Brady; "I have known your father for some time as a man about town, but I was not aware that he had a daughter."

"You know my father?" cried Mabel delightedly.

"O, yes; well."

"I have been at school abroad for six years, and I am going home for the first time. It is very pleasant to meet a man who knows my father."

"Mr. Granville Gray is a great ally of Lord George Lumley."

"Is it possible? How strange!"

Horace looked compassionately at her, and was silent for a brief space.

"What am I to understand," she asked, "respecting my only friend and parent? From your manner I fear that—that—"

She hesitated.

"I beg that you will not think that I intended in any way to disparage him," Horace hastened to exclaim; "certainly I should be the last to throw a stone at any man."

"But—"

She broke off again abruptly.

"If you press me, I must say that Granville Gray belongs to a fast set; still, I have no doubt whatever that you will find him a most excellent father."

"O, yes; I am confident of that."

Mabel then told him where she was to meet her father; and Horace offered to escort her to the hotel.

"If you do not know London," he said, "it will be best for you to have someone with you, in case—"

"Well?" she asked, as he paused.

"O, I do not know that I ought to say it. But Granville Gray has the reputation of never having kept an appointment in his life."

Mabel laughed.

"Really, Mr. Brady," she exclaimed, "you are not giving my father the best possible character; but I must not be angry with you, after the chivalrous way in which you defended me just now."

"Thank you for your kindness," he replied; "and believe me when I say that I value your good opinion most highly."

The breakfast-bell now rang, and they descended to the cabin together.

Lord George Lumley did not put in an appearance.

Perhaps he was ashamed of his behaviour to Mabel, or he did not care about facing her protector.

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE APPOINTMENT WAS KEPT.

WHEN the steamboat reached London-bridge, the usual excitement and bustle prevailed.

Calling a cab, Horace Brady had his own and Mabel's luggage put on it, and was driven with her to the hotel at which Mr. Granville Gray had appointed to meet his daughter.

They were a little in advance of the time, and Horace ordered some lunch in the coffee-room.

"I wonder," said Mabel, "that my father should have appointed a place over the water to meet me."

"There is nothing extraordinary in that," answered Horace, smiling.

"Why not?"

"Because it may be more convenient for him to be on the Surrey side of the water, if the sheriff of Middlesex is in search of him."

He was sorry he had made the remark almost immediately afterwards, for Mabel looked so pained.

"Have I distressed you?" he said.

"Very much," she answered.

"Pardon me," he replied; "I have got into such a light and careless way of talking, that I make observations without thinking."

"Tell me, Mr. Brady," she said. "Do you really think my father is embarrassed?"

"I don't know; I have always seen him with plenty of money. All I have heard is mere gossip."

"Will you repeat this gossip?"

"To you?"

"Yes."

"I would very much rather not; I may be mistaken, and hope most sincerely that I am. Your father would say that I had been poisoning his child's mind against him. You see in what a delicate situation I am."

"You have said quite enough," she replied in an altered tone; "I now know what I have to expect."

He in vain tried to rally her.

When the lunch came in she ate scarcely anything; and as the hour drew near at which she expected Mr. Granville Gray, she became more low, nervous, and full of anxiety.

Brady's remark about Granville Gray never keeping an appointment occurred to her, and she began to have misgivings for which she could not account.

Two o'clock came.

Her eyes were turned anxiously to the door.

From two to three she knew no peace.

It was so long since she had seen her father that she was not sure that she should recognise him again.

Addressing Mr. Brady, she exclaimed,

"You are not trifling with me; you really are acquainted with my father?"

"On my word as a gentleman."

"You would know him at once?"

"In a moment."

"And he has not yet entered this room?"

"Certainly not."

"Will you ask the waiters if they have received any message from him for me? Kindly oblige me by making inquiries."

"With pleasure," answered Horace Brady.

He interrogated the head-waiter, who knew Mr. Granville Gray very well as an occasional customer, and one who stayed at times in the hotel ; but he had not seen him for some days, nor had he left any message.

He was equally unsuccessful at the private bar. No one in the hotel had seen anything of Mr. Gray.

Mabel was much alarmed.

Could it be possible that her father had forgotten her, or was this neglect intentional?

Horace Brady explained his absence by suggesting that some important business-affair had kept him away, though he thought in his own mind that he had been arrested for some debt.

"Your best course, Miss Gray," he exclaimed, "will be to stop at the hotel ; your father will certainly come at some time or other, and he will expect you to wait for him."

"Thanks for your advice ; in the absence of anything better to do, I shall follow it," answered Mabel.

"Excuse me for asking if you have money?"

"O, yes, more than twenty pounds."

"That is sufficient for some time," he said.

"I should think so, though my experience of hotels is so slight that I do not know how long it will last. Am I to lose the pleasure and the advantage of your society?"

"I will come and see you to-morrow ; but I stay at another hotel in Middlesex."

"Indeed !"

"It is a place where I am known and expected."

This was not strictly true.

The fact was that Horace Brady had very little money left, and he wished to economise what he had. So he thought of taking a cheap lodging in some out-of-the-way place, as he did not know where the next supply of cash was to come from.

In the evening he took his leave, and Mabel was alone in a private sitting-room which he had engaged for her. She felt an oppressive sense of loneliness, and sighed for the presence of her father. She even regretted that Horace Brady, to whom she had taken a great fancy, should have left her.

A vague sense of uneasiness and trouble to come weighed down her spirits.

The next day Horace Brady called early at the hotel, and was received with great joy by Mabel.

"How kind of you !" she said. "You are the only friend—I may call you my friend?"

"Please do," he said.

"You are the only friend I have in the place, and it is such a relief to see you come in."

"You have heard no news of your father?"

"None."

"How strange !" observed Horace.

"I have been thinking that you might, with the good-nature I am sure you possess, find him out somewhere in town," said Mabel. "You know his haunts, or have a vague idea of them. If you were to search for him, you might find him."

"Unfortunately, Miss Gray," he answered, "I am under the ban; that is to say, there are writs out against me."

"Writs ! What are they ?" inquired Mabel.

"Charming innocence ! happy ignorance !" cried Horace, with a smile. "I hope you may always during your single and married life remain ignorant of those fatal slips which come to you from Victoria by the grace of God, and bring you greeting from Sir Alexander Cockburn, knight."

"What do you mean ?"

Brady explained the meaning of a writ to her, and she began to see that it would be unsafe to go to any place of fashionable or popular resort.

Then she wanted to know if she could go and look after her father, but he was obliged to shake his head, and tell her that he was afraid her father would be found in those places where ladies are not in the habit of congregating.

The more insight she got, inch-meal, as it were, into her father's inner life, the more grieved did she become.

Horace was a great deal with her, and he comforted her to the best of his ability, but at no time did he attempt to make love to her.

His heart was elsewhere.

Badly as Patty Brooks had treated him, he could

not teach his wayward heart to forget her; and he thought continually of her.

There was another reason why he did not make any advances of an amorous nature to Mabel. She was the young and inexperienced daughter of a man whom he knew, and he held that one who in his position took an advantage of a girl situated as she was, would be a mean, cowardly, and despicable villain, for whom pistolling on the spot would be too good.

A week passed.

Still no tidings came of Mr. Granville Gray.

Brady made inquiries through various underhand channels, but could gain no intelligence of him of an authentic nature. One informant told him that Mr. Gray, to avoid arrest, had gone to Paris until the affair was settled.

It was with considerable reluctance that he broke this news to Mabel, who received it more calmly than he had expected. She had been favoured with her account at the hotel, and the bill came to so much that she saw she should be wholly destitute if she continued another week there. This she confided to Horace Brady, and he commended her for making him the recipient of her confidence.

"Have you courage enough to meet the difficulty in the way in which it should be met?" he asked.

"O, yes; I hope so," answered Mabel.

"This, then, is my advice. Leave here at once. I will accompany you, and look for inexpensive lodgings with respectable people. When we have settled upon a place, we will return to the hotel for

your luggage, and leave a letter for Mr. Gray, which shall be given him if he calls. In the letter you must tell him how you have waited for him, how you are situated, and where you have gone to reside."

"Yes," answered Mabel after a moment's reflection; "that is decidedly the best course to be pursued under the circumstances, and I shall everlastingly be indebted to you if you will assist me to carry it out."

Horace Brady expressed his willingness to do so, and they went out together.

CHAPTER V

LOOKING FOR LODGINGS.

HORACE BRADY soon found that he had undertaken a difficult task.

If he had gone to those neighbourhoods where vice flourishes, and is, as it were, indigenous to the soil, he would have found plenty of lodgings, and landladies who make no objection to a single lady well-dressed and good-looking as a tenant. But he wished to keep her away from any locality where the purity of her mind might be shocked or her morals contaminated by evil example.

In endeavouring to carry out this praiseworthy intention, he went to districts where he met with many rebuffs, and in sheer despair took a cab at last, and crossed from Bloomsbury over Waterloo-bridge to try the chances of Kennington.

"Why will they not have me?" asked Mabel. "I should have thought that nothing would have been easier than to get lodgings in London, where there are so many to let."

"They have a prejudice against single ladies in many houses," answered Horace.

"Is there a want of respectability in being friendless?" inquired Mabel with the first touch of bitter-

ness which he had yet distinguished in her voice or manner.

"I fear there is."

"But you are with me."

"The world is so uncharitable. You do not know the world yet."

"Ah me!" said Mabel with a sigh, "perhaps my school-days were not so miserable after all, in comparison."

"With what?"

"Those which are to come."

"I think, if you do not mind, it will be as well for me to say that you are my sister," suggested Horace.

"I am sure that I feel proud of the supposed relationship, and wish that it were a fact."

Horace looked disappointed.

It is always agreeable to a man's vanity to know that a woman likes him, whether he can return her love or not.

If Mabel wished him her brother, it was clear that she had never, even remotely, thought of him as a lover or a husband, and therefore only regarded him as a friend.

This momentary look of chagrin, arising from wounded pride, passed unnoticed by Mabel.

They got out of the cab near Kennington Park, and walked about for upwards of an hour, meeting with no success.

Those who had lodgings to let over the water were quite as fastidious as those on the north of the Thames.

There was always some objection.

If the landlady was willing to accept Mabel as a tenant, the rent was too high, or the street not nice enough. If, on the other hand, Mabel took a liking to a place, the people of the house asked for references, which she was unable to give, and in which matter Brady could not assist her.

At about seven o'clock they found themselves at the top of that spacious thoroughfare, Newington-causeway, and Mabel declared that she felt so tired she could go no further without some refreshment.

Horace was weary and disgusted, and would have had something to drink long before, had he not been unwilling to offend the susceptibilities of Mabel, to whom the interior of a public-house was unknown ground.

They looked in vain for a confectioner's.

At last Horace exclaimed :

"I think there will be no harm in my taking you into a tavern ; it is not exactly the place for a lady ; but no one knows you, and I can protect you from any probable insult."

Mabel made no answer, and they entered one of those large gin-palaces in which the poor forget their cares, and a fictitious and temporary happiness is dearly purchased by the after consequences.

Some bottled stout and a biscuit restored Mabel's wasted energies, and she looked around her. They were in a private bar, and the only person in it besides themselves was a young woman, scarcely a year older than Mabel, dressed in somewhat tawdry finery, and having an impudent expression which the

observer would not have expected to meet with in so young and pretty a face; traces of dissipation were to be seen in her countenance, which was flushed with excesses either of that day or the day before.

"What a worry this looking for lodgings is!" exclaimed Mabel.

The woman heard this remark, and said :

"Perhaps you don't know the neighbourhood?"

"No, indeed," answered Mabel; "we are both of us strangers about here, and have found ourselves sadly in want of a guide."

"What lodgings do you want?" asked the woman.

"Two rooms for myself."

"And that gentleman?"

"I am this lady's brother," Horace promptly answered.

"O, that's how it is. I think I can manage it for you. Evidently you want to live on the cheap, or you would not come on this side of the water."

"Thank you very much. If you know of any place, I shall be glad to look at it, and if it suits me, take it on your recommendation," Mabel said.

"Very well, I'll do what I can," the woman answered.

During this colloquy, Horace had leant over the bar, and spoke a few words to the landlord in a low tone, who had answered him in the same mysterious way. Turning to the woman, Horace exclaimed :

"Just one moment, if you will favour me."

"What for?"

"I want to speak to you."

"All right," she replied, coming over to the corner of the box in which he had retired.

"Now what is it?" she demanded.

"Simply this: the lady with me is respectable, and from what the landlord has told me, you are well known, and not quite the sort of person to trust a girl with."

"Yes, I am gay," she answered, with a sad smile, "but I can't help that. They all know me about here; I wish they didn't."

"What object can you have in wishing to contaminate a girl, and bring her to your own level?"

"Who says I wanted to do anything of the sort?" cried the woman, almost fiercely. "I deny it altogether; and to prove to you that I had no such intention, I will tell you where I meant to take her."

"Where?"

"To my mother. I left home nearly eighteen months ago, and I can tell you that no one can say a word against my mother or my sister. They have a little money to live upon, and help it out by dress-making. My name's Lotty Leigh, and you can ask your friend the landlord if my mother is not respectable."

"If so, I should think your recommendation would have little weight with her," said Horace.

"Upon my word," exclaimed Lotty Leigh, "you have said more to me than a good many I know dare; but you are a good-looking fellow, and I'll forgive you. With regard to the lodgings," she added, seeing that Horace hesitated, "I shall be doing you a good turn, and the old woman too, for I know she is

empty ; at least, she was last night when I passed by, and I don't suppose she has let between this and then."

Horace begged her to wait a minute, and again spoke to the landlord, who told him that he had heard the girl's friends were very respectable.

" Well, Mr. Brady," said Mabel, " what are we to do ?"

" I think we may trust the girl," he answered.

" Why not ? She is the kindest, best-hearted creature we have met to-day," replied Mabel.

Horace smiled, and beckoned to Lotty Leigh.

" Do your friends live far from here ?" he asked.

" No. Just at the bottom of the London-road."

" We will accept your offer, and perhaps you will kindly show us the way ?"

" Certainly. But you must stand something before we go. I haven't any money," answered Lotty with a frankness which made Mabel draw out her purse, and offer her part of its contents.

This Lotty Leigh refused point-blank, telling Horace that the landlord knew her weakness ; and it appeared he did, for without being asked he gave her a glass of neat gin, which she tossed off as if it had been water.

" I came here," she said confidentially to Horace, " to meet a man who has treated me badly ; and if he did not square up, I should have given him a hiding, and probably got a month, as they know me pretty well at the Stone's-end Station."

Horace made no reply ; he was accustomed to the vagaries of such women, and knew that they were

all alike subject to fits of ungovernable passion, and that it was but a question of degree with them. Chelsea was a little better than the Borough, and the latter a slight improvement perhaps on White-chapel and Ratchiff-highway.

"I'll go on first," added Lotty, "and lead the way; as you will not perhaps care about being seen with me, though it is getting dark."

"As you like," replied Horace, who perfectly agreed with her, though he did not like to say so for fear of hurting her feelings.'

Offering his arm to Mabel, they followed their conductor down the London-road, till they came to the Obelisk, and walked on until the woman stopped before a neat clean-looking house in one of the streets in that neighbourhood.

"Here's the place," she said, as her new friends came up with her. "Wait here, please, while I go in and see how the ground lays."

She knocked at the door, which was opened by a prim-looking neatly-dressed woman, about three- or four-and-twenty, who started with visible repugnance when she saw who her visitor was.

After a brief conversation, Lotty was admitted, and the door shut behind her.

"How very fortunate our meeting with this kind friend is!" observed Mabel.

"I hope so, I am sure," answered Horace.

"You do not seem to be so favourably impressed as I am."

"I confess it. Her friends are, I believe, re-

spectable; but she is not the proper sort of companion for you," he answered.

Mabel blushed, she scarcely knew why. Her instinct, rather than her experience and knowledge of the world, told her what he meant, for her pure mind had not harboured a thought of evil hitherto. Certainly she had a knowledge of right and wrong, but she was slow to suspect anyone.

"Shall we—ought we to go in?" she queried.

"Now we are here, we may as well see what the place and the people are like," he answered.

"I am in your hands, Mr. Brady, and I am confident that you will care for me as a brother should for a sister."

"I would rather have my right hand cut off than lead you into any danger," he rejoined.

This assurance satisfied Mabel, and they waited with impatience to be summoned inside.

Five minutes elapsed, and the shades of night began to fall, though there was that delicious twilight which always characterises a summer evening.

CHAPTER VI.

WITH FRIENDS.

At length the door opened again, and Lotty Leigh beckoned them in.

Mabel felt quite relieved, for she was fainting with fatigue, there being nothing so tiring as house-hunting, and she had begun to fear that the proprietors of the house had refused to receive them.

As they entered, Lotty exclaimed,

"I have had some trouble to induce the old girl to believe in any nomination of mine. I told you I should have my work cut out for me. However, it is right enough now, I think ; and you will only have to give a reference, or pay a month in advance, whichever you like best."

Lotty threw open a door which conducted into a plainly-furnished sitting-room. Lying upon a sofa, propped up with cushions, was an old, ladylike person, who looked very ill. She was in a decline, and the worry which her youngest daughter's secession from the path of virtue had occasioned her, had not improved her malady.

Her face was stern, and her manner repellent. Her temper was soured by many events of an un-

pleasant nature, and she could not bring herself to conciliate anyone.

At the head of the sofa stood the prim old maidish sort of woman who had admitted Lotty, and who was her elder sister Annie.

In various parts of the room were articles such as are to be found in dress-makers' houses : unfinished skirts, ribbons, trimming of different kinds, needles, thread, and so on, which showed that Annie was industrious.

The old lady made an apology for keeping them waiting, and said something about unfortunately not being able to place any reliance upon her youngest daughter's statements.

"I don't think that I have deceived you so often that you should say that, mother," replied Lotty. "However, you should tell my friends whether you can let your room or not."

"Friends?" repeated Mrs. Leigh. "I thought—"

"You know what I mean. I met them accidentally, as I told you, looking out for a place, and finding that they wanted a home, or rather the girl, I brought them here."

"Perhaps you will allow me to say that my sister and I have just come from France," said Horace. "We have been stopping at a hotel, and find that too expensive. It is necessary that Miss Gray—that is her name—should have lodgings. I have to go to another part of the town, where my business arrangements take me."

"May I ask what you are by profession?" inquired Mrs. Leigh.

“An artist.”

“O, indeed! If I was not such a confirmed invalid, I would ask you to paint my portrait.”

“I only paint landscapes,” said Horace, who had no idea of drawing whatever.

“It is of no consequence,” resumed the old lady; “your sister can have one large bedroom and the use of this sitting-room, if that will answer her purpose.”

That was all either Mabel or Horace wanted to hear. The arrangement was made at once; and Horace, after seeing Mabel pay a month’s rent—two guineas in advance to clench the bargain—started off to the hotel for her luggage, and returned with it before ten o’clock, she having discharged her bill before she went out in the morning.

Horace took an affectionate farewell of Mabel, promising faithfully to come and see her in two or three days at the utmost. Lotty had gone as soon as the arrangement was completed; for, since her adoption of the life she was leading, her mother refused to see or have anything to do with her.

In taking leave of Horace, Mabel entreated him on the doorstep, where they were out of hearing of the inmates of the house, to gain what intelligence he could of her father. This he undertook to do, and went away.

Mabel knew that his position was not very encouraging, but she did not know that he was really in want of money. In point of fact, her position was infinitely superior and more comfortable than his.

Judgments were registered against him. Im-

portunate creditors were waiting to serve him with writs, and his stock of ready-money was deplorably low, growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less day by day.

Mabel, in fact, was ignorant of all this ; nor did she know that he had taken a small and cheap lodging in a northern suburb, where he had never been before, and where it was unlikely anyone would recognise him.

Here he eked out his slender means, looking over journals and answering advertisements, in the vain hope of getting something to do.

He had been brought up to no trade or profession ; he was practically ignorant of all kinds of city work, and there were so many men out of employment that he stood a poor chance of being engaged by anyone.

Still he struggled on.

Had he been a skilled workman, he might have got work which would have kept body and soul together. He was, however, that anomalous creature, a gentleman, and all avenues were closed against him.

Occasionally he thought of Major Rastock, and the offer which he had made him. In his pocket-book he still carried the card which that singular being had given him.

More than once he was strongly tempted to burn it ; but the address and the name were firmly graven on his heart, and he could not forget him, had he chosen to try to do so. Brought up in habits of ease and luxury, plentifully supplied with money, he found

it very hard to be thrown on his own resources and subjected to innumerable privations.

The tempter did not triumph. He held out against the seductive allurements of Major Rastock, who did not receive the summons from him upon which he had calculated.

Mabel did not take Mrs. Leigh wholly into her confidence, though she told her that she was expecting to see her father, and that when he appeared her tenancy would cease.

The days rolled on.

Mabel's purse, well-filled as it was when she left Boulogne, did not prove inexhaustible, and she began to puzzle herself how she should maintain herself when her money was all gone.

Being skilled in plain and fancy needlework, she asked Mrs. Leigh if she might assist her daughter.

Her offer was gladly accepted.

So industrious and clever was she, that she became an invaluable acquisition to the mother and daughter, for her taste, naturally good, had been tutored in France, and she introduced designs of her own for trimming and making both dresses and bonnets, which were held by everyone to be excellent.

Horace Brady called repeatedly at the hotel, but Mabel's letter remained in the hands of the manager, Mr. Granville Gray not having been seen or heard of.

"Do you think," asked Mabel, "that my father would intentionally desert me?"

"I should be very sorry to believe that of him. Has there been any mistake?"

"In the place of appointment?"

"Yes."

"O, no; the hotel was distinctly mentioned in his letter."

"Perhaps the affair has slipped his memory, and he believes you are yet in Boulogne, comfortably residing at your old school," said Horace.

Mabel communicated with Mrs. Chaplin, telling her what had happened, and how she was situated.

The latter replied by return of post, and strongly urged her to come back again, telling her that as her school-bills were paid, she would be able to reside with Madame Landry for another year.

This course Mabel could not bring herself to adopt, though her common sense told her it was the most prudent she had open to her.

The discipline of the school, the monotonous round of studies, and the dreary life of the *pension*, gave her an invincible repugnance to be any more a schoolgirl.

A friendship had sprung up between her and Annie Leigh, which rendered her lot tolerable, and she so increased the income of the mother and daughter by her exertions, that they declared they should not require a penny from her for either board or lodging so long as she stayed with them and continued to work as she had done hitherto.

Mabel tried to get Annie Leigh to talk about her sister, but she invariably changed the subject, and at length she desisted in her efforts.

"At all events," she said one day, "if you and your mother will have nothing to do with her, I

should be only too happy to thank her for introducing me to you whenever I meet her."

"I hope you never may meet," replied Annie.

Annie would not explain her reasons for disliking and discouraging her visits to the house. The unfortunate girl had put herself without the pale of their civilisation, and there was no hope for her.

"We trust she may be induced to emigrate to Australia some day," observed the mother, on one occasion; "and then we shall get rid of her."

Mabel thought this an unfeeling thing for a mother to say, for it was equivalent to deserting her child. While reflecting upon this circumstance, her mind reverted to her father. Had not he deserted her? It seemed as if he had, and in the most cowardly and unmerited manner.

Still her heart was full of loving-kindness, and she could not bring herself to condemn him.

How far he was worthy of her moderation and sympathy will be seen as our story proceeds, and Mr. Granville Gray is introduced to the reader.

Six weeks passed away, and as Mrs. Leigh refused to take any more money from Mabel, her purse still retained goodly proportions. If she had known how distressed Horace Brady was becoming, she would gladly have poured it all into his hand, and asked him to do what he liked with it.

He kept his secret well.

"No, no," he said to himself, as he thought of her good-nature; "I know I could get money from her; but I have not sunk so low yet as to be able to take money from a woman upon whom I have no

claim, and who is, after all, a comparative stranger to me."

Sometimes he met some old friends in the streets as he wandered about in a purposeless manner, and they, seeing how shabby his attire was, in some cases offered him money, and he, having often entertained them, did not scruple to take a sovereign or a couple of sovereigns ; and so he got on from hand to mouth.

At last he was so reduced that he had but half-a-crown in the world left.

He owed money at his lodgings, and his landlady looked coldly at him whenever he met her in the passage or at the door.

His position was becoming desperate.

Those friends who had assisted him, now when they met turned their backs on him, or pleaded a pressing engagement, which precluded the possibility of their stopping to talk.

Having belonged to a fast set, he was to some extent a drinker, and he was deprived even of the consolation of obtaining beer or spirits, for he could not afford to pay for them, nor could he meet anyone who cared sufficiently about him, or took sufficient interest in him, to treat him.

He was a poor devil who had nothing.

What good could he be to anybody ?

A man to whom he had been very kind in his prosperous days openly spoke of him as a " scampish sort of fellow, who had no money."

For two days he had eaten nothing but dry bread, and this diet told severely on his system. He became wan, and the state of his mind was legible upon his

face, and a driving fiend was ever at his elbow, urging him to call upon Major Rastock in the Albany and accept his terms, which proceeding would place him in affluence once more.

But, poor as he was, he refused to do this.

The half-crown which still remained to him would have provided him with two dinners, for he had learnt the art of dining cheaply.

When we first saw him, he thought nothing of spending five or ten pounds for a supper; now he was glad to get a dinner for a shilling.

Such is the fate of many a man.

Horace could not reproach himself with having been extravagant; he had not lived beyond his means. If a man has ten thousand a-year and lives up to it, he cannot be called reckless if he does not exceed it. He was not one of those who burn the candle at both ends and in the middle. His distress was the result of a pure accident, for which he was not in the remotest degree to blame.

He continued to call upon Mabel Gray, though he could not bring her any tidings of her father.

The general report was that Granville Gray was abroad; why or wherefore rumour did not say.

On the third day of his extreme distress he paid a visit to the neat little house in the small street near the Blackfriars-road.

He still had the solitary half-crown in his pocket, but he dined on a biscuit and a glass of water, determining to keep it, and spend it the next day.

He could not echo the old saying, "Sweet are the uses of adversity,"—he found them very bitter.

Owing to his inability to pay for a conveyance, he was obliged to walk to the street in which the Leighs resided, and he was nearly exhausted by the time he arrived there. He had started in good time, hoping to get there before six in the evening, when he knew that they would be having a cup of tea. Such was his reduction of strength, and prostration generally, that it was not until nearly nine that he reached the temporary abode of Mabel.

Leaning against the doorway, he had to wait some few minutes to recover his breath, and sufficient strength to ring the bell. When at last he did so, and Annie Leigh admitted him, he rather staggered than walked into the room, and sat down in his accustomed place on the sofa.

At once perceiving the state in which he was, Mabel, who had risen to welcome him, exclaimed,

“ You are ill ! ”

“ It is nothing,” he replied, “ my walk has tired me ; that is all.”

Mrs. Leigh’s experienced eye told her that he was suffering rather from physical than nervous prostration, and she rang the bell for Annie, who had gone out of the room, telling her on her entrance to bring supper.

This was speedily supplied, and much against his will, he consented to have something to eat. His appetite was ravenous. He was ashamed of it ; but the requirements of nature once satisfied, he soon got better.

He was now able to join in the conversation, to Mabel’s great and undisguised satisfaction. Mrs.

Leigh, however, had noticed his reluctance to eat anything, and thought it odd that a brother should have any hesitation in partaking of what was really a sister's hospitality.

Annie was glancing over some old newspapers which she had raked out of a cupboard upstairs, and a paragraph having arrested her attention, she begged permission to read it, which was promptly and unanimously accorded her.

"The paragraph," she began, "is headed, 'The Doll of the Period,' and I never heard of such extravagance before. Fancy a doll costing eighty pounds ! It was made last year in Paris, so says the paper, for a young English gentleman, who intended it for one of the fair nymphs of St. John's Wood."

"How scandalous !" exclaimed Mrs. Leigh.

"Is it not ? But listen to this description of the doll : 'It was dressed in a short costume of pearl-gray cashmere, worn over a petticoat of cerise satin ; a grand-duchesse hat of pearl-gray feathers, with full-blown rose. It has several dresses besides ; but the two most worthy of notice are a dinner- and ball-dress—the first is a rich silk of turquoise blue, made with two bodies ; the latter is of Valenciennes lace, with the smallest bit of muslin let in. The cost of this lace dress is twelve pounds. Then there is a white cashmere peignoir beautifully embroidered, also muslin ones trimmed with lace. The whole of the under-linen is of the finest batiste, richly trimmed with Valenciennes. The pocket-handkerchiefs are perfect cobwebs of lace. A half-square shawl of fine Brussels lace ; a carved-ivory fan ; gloves of all kinds ; a bonnet

of white blond trimmed with forget-me-nots; boots, shoes, and slippers; a box full of lovely china and glass for the toilet; and last, though not least, a real Indian cashmere. The whole of the linen is marked with the initials P. B.—the name of the recipient of the present being Patty Brooks, one of the bright stars of the demi-monde; and the donor is said to be Mr. Horace Brady, a young gentleman well known at Oxford, and in London fashionable circles.’”

Mabel Gray looked up at Horace with a half smile. He too smiled faintly as he remembered this instance of his prodigality and folly.

“It is positively wicked,” said Mrs. Leigh.

“Is it not?” answered Annie; “many a bride does not have such a trousseau, nor, indeed, the money it cost for a marriage-portion.”

“That reminds me that I picked up a card with the name ‘Horace Brady’ on it,” observed Mrs. Leigh.

“When?” asked Mabel.

“Only the other day.”

“I must have dropped it,” exclaimed Horace. “Mr. Brady was a friend of mine, and it is just possible that I had one of his cards about me.”

“Really!” ejaculated Mrs. Leigh, eyeing him suspiciously.

“I cannot congratulate you upon your choice of acquaintance,” remarked Annie, whose prudery would crop up to the surface.

He said nothing, and soon rose to go.

Mrs. Leigh could not help thinking that “Mr. Gray, my brother,” as Mabel called him, might

actually be Horace Brady, ruined by his extravagant habits and riotous living.

Was it possible that her disreputable daughter had laid a plot to introduce some bad character, with whom she was on terms of intimacy, into her house?

Mabel, however, was too open-hearted and innocent to be anything of the sort. She could not think it of her, nor did she on consideration believe that Lotty would be guilty of a deliberate falsehood.

Still, there was a mystery somewhere; of that she was sure; but at present she was unable to fathom it.

When Horace got outside the door he was a different man. The food, of which he stood so much in need, had put strength into him.

Scarcely had he turned the corner of the street than he met Lotty Leigh, who at once accosted him, saying,

"I have been looking for you; and thinking that you would pay your sister a visit, I hung about the street."

"For me?" said Horace, in surprise.

Lotty's appearance was much changed since we saw her last. Her hat was battered out of shape and the feather gone; her dress was torn and muddy; her cheeks pale, in spite of the dabs of coarse rouge which covered them; and she looked like one who had been away from her lodgings for a day and a night, if not longer, and who had been engaged in one or two free fights in the interval, while in a state of intoxication.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I know I have no claim upon you," she said ; "but I am dreadfully hard-up, and I've been out of luck lately. I've been drinking, and I've had a fight. I want to go home and lay up ; but I must have some money, and I thought you would lend me five pounds."

"You should have it with pleasure," he answered, "but I have not got it."

"Can't you get it?" asked Lotty, whose countenance fell.

"You won't believe me if I tell you," he replied, "that I have only half-a-crown in the world, and don't know where to get another. I haven't a friend in the world, and am quite on my beam-ends."

"And you such a gentleman!" exclaimed Lotty, with open eyes. "When I first saw you, I took you for a topping swell, worth lots of tin ; but I suppose you've had your day, like lots of others, and now you're suffering for it. There is your sister, though—she has money ; I saw it in her purse ; and I hear she is so clever with her needle, that mother won't take anything for her board and lodging."

"I can't ask her," he said.

"Not ask your sister ! Say it's for me. It will be a good thing for you and me too. What you get we'll halve, and it may carry you on till something turns up."

"Very well ; I'll try what I can do. Meet me here to-morrow night," he answered.

"Not here ; say at the corner of Stamford-street. I hate coming up this gloomy and miserable road," said Lotty.

“As you like.”

“You are sure to make your sister part. She’ll give you all she’s got if you pitch her a tale about me, and say in what distress I am. She’s good-hearted, I’m sure, from what little I saw of her that day; and now, as you’re pretty nearly certain to pull something off to-morrow, you may as well stand drinks out of your half-crown—a drink won’t hurt either of us.”

Horace was of the same opinion, and though at any other time he would not have cared about being seen with so low a woman as Lotty, misery bridged the gulf between them, and he walked down the Blackfriars-road with her until she came to a public-house where she was known.

Here they had something to drink. He gave her a shilling, repeated his promise to meet her on the following evening, and hurried home to his lodgings.

He had not gone far before Lotty, who had run after, overtook him, and laying her hand on his arm, said breathlessly,

“Excuse me for stopping you, but a friend of mine came into the public just as you left, and seeing he was flush, I got half-a-sovereign from him—here it is; take it, for I see you want it, and leave me to get some more from him when I go back.”

Horace was astonished at this proof of the liberality of the girl’s heart; but he kindly and firmly refused her donation, or loan, as she wished him to believe it.

“Come,” she continued, “don’t say no. You are a good sort; you stood something when I was

awfully down on my luck, and if you had not done so, I don't think I should have had the pluck to speak to my man."

She put the half-sovereign into his hand.

They were standing beneath a lamp-post, so that anyone passing by could see her action. Having made him take it, she wished him good-night, adding, "Remember to-morrow;" and was off again before he could say a word or return her the money.

A gentleman passing by saw what the girl had done, and made a half halt to get a look at the face of the recipient of such questionable charity.

Their eyes met.

To Horace Brady's intense chagrin he beheld Arthur Paveley, who gave him a nod, saying :

"How do? You are in luck, I see. Is your new *rôle* profitable?"

Burning with indignation, Horace sprang forward and dashed his fist into his former friend's face, causing him to measure his length on the pavement.

Striding over the prostrate man, he exclaimed :

"Dare to breath one word of a similar nature to me, and I will strangle you, cowardly hound—wretched timeserver !"

Arthur Paveley got up, feeling very dizzy about the head, and sore about the face. He did not venture to strike back again, nor did he think it prudent to provoke a continuation of the quarrel, call for the police, and get Horace locked up in a police-cell. He contented himself with darting a bitter glance at him, saying in a sibilant tone,

"I'll be revenged for this. Everyone shall

know that you are a Stamford-street pensioner on the bounty of loose women."

Horace made another dash at him, but he took to his heels, and soon disappeared in the distance, leaving Horace panting with rage, and sobbing with vexation to think that a former associate should have witnessed his apparent degradation, and subjected him to such unbearable insults.

That he would keep his word, and spread false and calumnious reports respecting him, he felt sure.

In no enviable frame of mind, he walked home, religiously preserving the half-sovereign, which he determined to give back to Lotty in its integrity when he met her.

But alas for the resolves of poor human nature !

In Holborn he met a man he had known formerly, and on being asked to drink, consented. In his excitable state a little alcohol took effect upon him, and after two glasses of brandy-and-water, he forgot everything, went from one tavern to another with his friend, and returned home long after midnight in a cab, scarcely able to open the street-door with his latch-key, and waking in the middle of the next day with a splitting headache and a bad sixpence.

He cursed his folly, but he might have spared himself reproaches. He had been brought up in dissipation, and had acquired habits of recklessness which it was impossible for him to divest himself of all at once, even if he ever succeeded in throwing them off.

Nothing was left for him but to go to Mabel, and see what money he could extract from her. She re-

ceived him with the usual sparkle of pleasure in her lustrous eyes, and while left alone with her for a few minutes, told her what he wanted.

"Certainly," she replied, putting her purse in his hand ; "why did you not tell me before? But, Mr. Brady, if you are unable to relieve the pressing necessities of Lotty, you must be as poor as she."

He lowered his head, and made no reply.

"It is so!" she cried, while the tears started to her eyes. "Is this kind of you? We were to be as brother and sister to each other, and you are positively in want, and did not tell me. Certainly, you said you were in debt; but I know so little of the world that I did not guess the actual truth. Pray take all I have; it is at your service. Repay me when you can. Give what you think proper to Lotty Leigh, and keep the remainder for yourself."

Horace could only murmur his grateful thanks.

Presently he said, in a hard stony voice:

"I have a means at my disposal by which I can get money, and I will no longer hesitate. You shall soon be repaid."

Alarmed both at the tone in which he spoke, and his manner, which was wild and excited, Mabel said:

"Pray do not do anything rash from a foolish feeling of mistaken honour. Don't be ashamed of borrowing from me; I would not hesitate to ask you if I were in want. Is our friendship but a name, and must it perish directly it is put to the test?"

Horace Brady thought of that eventful night at

Cremorne, when he had asked Arthur Paveley what friendship was, and demanded a definition of love from Patty.

They understood the theory, but were woefully wanting in the practice.

"You are a noble girl!" he exclaimed.

"Thank you for your good opinion, and act so in future as to make me think you a noble man," she answered, with a light laugh.

He took his leave, with a heart deprived of some of its heavy load of care.

His pride was being humbled day by day. Now that the ordeal of asking Mabel for money was over, he felt less ashamed of it than he had expected he should. It was something to know that he had the means in his pocket of getting something to eat from day to day, and of paying the rent of his lodgings.

During the whole of that day he had not eaten anything, but he resolved to wait until he saw Lotty before he gratified his appetite and appeased his hunger.

She was at the appointed place at the appointed time, and seemed in better spirits than she was before. With her was a woman considerably taller, better dressed, and more impudent in her manner. Her voice, from continual exposure to the weather, and an indulgence in dram-drinking, was not as melodious as it might have been, though her features were good, and there was a charm about her face, which it was a pity was somewhat marred by the redness of her rather-prominent nose.

"Have you got the coin?" was Lotty's salutation.

"Yes," he replied shortly.

"That's all right," she exclaimed joyfully. "Come to a place I know, and while we are having supper we can talk over matters and divide the money. That was our arrangement, I think?"

"Certainly," replied Horace.

"My friend Fanny Lawson," continued Lotty. "Your name's—what? I forget."

"Jones, for the occasion," he answered.

"O, you think that's good enough for over the water, do you?" said Fanny Lawson, in her delightfully-mellifluous accents.

"I don't intend to change it," he rejoined.

Fanny Lawson looked angrily at him, and half-opened her lips, as if inclined to make some violent retort, but she thought better of it.

They soon came to an unpretending-looking place, where the girls were evidently known, and supper for them was ordered. Fanny watched Horace with cupidity in her gaze while he opened the purse, and counted out eleven sovereigns, giving Lotty six, and keeping the other five himself.

During supper she made herself as agreeable to him as possible, getting close to him, and pretending not to notice the evident repugnance which he did not take the trouble to conceal.

"What wine shall we have?" she asked.

"If you or your friend like to have any, you can pay for it," he said. "I'm good for s. and b.'s, or beer, but I'm not in the humour to stand the

rubbing wine you would get at a place like this."

Fanny lowered her pretensions, and was content with some lemonade-and-sherry, reserving the soda-and-brandy which he had offered her until afterwards.

After supper, he paid the bill, and rose to take leave of the women, telling Lotty he had done all he could for her, and hoped she was satisfied. She said she was, and he wished her good-night.

Fanny Lawson threw her arms round him, and declared that he should not go without giving her a kiss, as she had not met such an agreeable man for a long time.

He disengaged her arms as soon as he was able, and once more saying good-night, took his leave.

When he got over the bridge he entered a tavern to get something to drink, and searched in his pockets for the purse which Mabel had given him, and which he was sure he had put back again after paying for the supper.

It was gone.

All that he had left was the silver which the waiter had given him when he handed him some gold to pay for the supper.

He could not doubt that he had been robbed, and by a clever thief. That the thief was Fanny Lawson he also had no doubt. He was inclined to be angry with himself for being so stupid as to be duped in such a manner; but he was the more enraged with the impudent woman who had deprived him of his only means of subsistence.

What should he do?

In vain he asked himself the question.

To follow the girls was a mode of procedure which he could not adopt, because, even if he found them, which was extremely problematical, he should be unable to give one in charge of the police without the other, as they were perhaps accomplices, or would be called so by the officers of justice.

He went sadly back to his lodging, and grew more desperate hour by hour.

The iron was entering into his soul.

Never had he felt so reckless, and so inclined to accept any terms which would reinstate him in his former position, and extricate him from the slough of despair in which he had fallen.

Everything was combining to drive him to call upon the mysterious Major Rastock.

CHAPTER VII.

MORE TROUBLE.

ONE of Mrs. Leigh's best customers was a Mrs. French Hay, who resided in one of the well-built, commodious houses in the once fashionable neighbourhood of Bloomsbury.

Mrs. Hay had sent a dress to be made, and some very handsome handkerchiefs edged with lace to be embroidered with her initials.

When the day arrived for them to be sent home, they were finished, but Annie was too unwell to go with them, and Mrs. Leigh was far too much of an invalid to be equal to the exertion of taking them herself.

In this dilemma, the old lady had no resource but Mabel, and she asked her if she would mind carrying the handbox, and conveying it to Russell-square.

"It is seven o'clock now, my dear," she said; "and if you take an omnibus you will soon be there. No one will see you; so you need not suffer in your dignity."

"It does not matter in the least, my dear Mrs. Leigh," answered Mabel; "for I am a stranger in

London, and know nobody except my father, who, as I have told you, has apparently deserted me."

The tears came into her eyes, as this subject rose up before her.

It was the one great trouble of her young life.

"Never mind, my child," said Mrs. Leigh soothingly. "I daresay Heaven in its own good time will right that for you."

"I hope so, I am sure; and if you continue kind to me I have nothing to fear," Mabel replied, drying her tears.

"So long as you conduct yourself with propriety, so long will I give you my protection, which you amply repay by your industry and behaviour generally. God knows you are a comfort to me. I have told Annie that I believe you have been sent to me to fill the place of that bad girl who has caused me so much misery."

Mabel crossed the room and kissed the old lady on the forehead.

"Thank you," she said; "I try to do my best."

"I know it. Will you go this evening for me? You need not fear the perils of the streets; no harm comes to those who do not seek it."

"I will gladly go; it will be interesting to play the part of a little milliner," answered Mabel, smiling.

"Very well. I will help you to pack the box, which will not be heavy. Mrs. French Hay, I must tell you, is a particular, crotchety old lady; but as she is a good customer, I humour her. If she is not civil to you, don't resent it, for my sake."

Mabel promised to bear this in mind. The box was packed, and she started on her errand. It was the first time since she had been in London that she had been out by herself. Annie Leigh had several times taken her to Kennington-park for a walk, but now she was to find her way to a comparatively distant part of town.

She walked down the road until she saw an omnibus. It was full inside, so she trudged on, coming at last to the corner of Stamford-street, where two women were standing.

One was Lotty Leigh, the other her friend and companion, Fanny Lawson.

They looked at her; Lotty instantly recognising her, and advancing to meet her.

Mabel was a little annoyed at this encounter, but she could not very well refuse to stop and shake hands.

"Well, I'm so glad!" exclaimed Lotty. "Going home with some work, I suppose?—This is the lodger of mother's I was telling you about," she added to Fanny.

Fanny gave her a smile and a nod.

"We live round the corner, on the ground-floor," continued Lotty; "you must come in and have something. Will you?"

"I do not want anything; I am not thirsty, thanks," replied Mabel.

"That does not matter. You can do a drain of gin, I'll bet, whether you want it or not. If you can't, you're the first woman who couldn't I ever met," responded Fanny Lawson.

Against her better judgment, Mabel was persuaded

to enter the house, saying she could not stop long.

She had not been long there before Fanny Lawson expressed a wish to look at the dress ; and without waiting for permission, opened the box and took it out.

After admiring it very much, she folded it up, replaced it, and told Mabel that she would not keep her any longer, as it was growing late, adding,

“ We, too, cannot afford to stay here and enjoy the luxury of your society, dear, as we have to look for our living.”

This enigmatical phrase puzzled Mabel, who just then did not think she would ever be placed in a similar position, but she did not like to ask its meaning.

Taking her box, she quitted the house, followed by the kind wishes of the two women, and was fortunate enough to catch an omnibus at the foot of the bridge.

In half-an-hour she was in Russell-square, where Mrs. French Hay was anxiously expecting her arrival, and received her in the drawing-room.

“ How late you are, young woman ! ” she exclaimed when Mabel had told her where she came from. “ You people always dawdle. I suppose, if the truth were known, you were sent off hours ago, and stopped to gossip with some low acquaintances on the road.”

• Recollecting what Mrs. Leigh had told her, Mabel checked the angry retort which rose to her lips, though she could not restrain the impatient blood

which crimsoned her face, almost as much at the truthfulness of the accusation as at the rudeness of the language in which it was couched.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to unpack the box when you have done staring about you, unless you expect me to do it for you," continued Mrs. Hay.

Recalled to her position, and the duties it entailed upon her, Mabel proceeded to do as she was requested, and displayed the dress, of which Mrs. Hay was pleased to express her approval.

"But the kerchiefs — where are they?" asked Mrs. Hay.

Mabel searched the box, and shook the dress, but could find no trace of them.

That they were in the box when she started she was certain, for she had placed them there herself. They must have dropped out on the way, or—

The alternative took her breath away.

They might have been dropped at Lotty Leigh's lodgings; and if so, were they safe? This was the question she debated in her mind.

Noticing her sudden pallor, which Mrs. Hay took to be the sign of a guilty conscience, she exclaimed with asperity,

"I ask you where my property is, and you give me no answer; what am I to suppose?"

"I will make inquiries, ma'am, and bring them in the morning," replied Mabel.

"It is my firm conviction, young woman, that you know more about those handkerchiefs than you choose to tell. It would not surprise me in the

least if you were mixed up in some plot to rob me of them."

"Indeed, madam, I am not," Mabel replied, terrified.

"What would you say if I was to send for a policeman, and give you in charge?"

"I could say no more than I have said already."

"Don't be impertinent!" exclaimed Mrs. French Hay; "I cannot tolerate that in such as you. I have a very good mind to send for a constable."

Mabel burst into tears.

"Cease all that 'nonsense!'" cried Mrs. Hay sharply; "it will have no effect upon me. Of course you can shed tears at will."

She placed her hand upon the bell-rope.

Mabel sprang forward, and entreated her not to ring, as she was really innocent of any design to rob her. While Mrs. Hay was hesitating, a servant knocked at the door, and entered.

"What is it, James?" she asked.

"Lord George, ma'am," the footman answered.

"Lord George who? Why are you not more explicit; and how dare you take the liberty of abbreviating the names of my visitors?"

"Lord George Lumley, ma'am," said the man, correcting himself.

"Let him come up."

Mrs. French Hay was Lord George Lumley's aunt, and he was a frequent visitor at her house.

Mabel started at hearing his name, for she felt sure he was the same person who had insulted her on board the boat.

"I will ask my nephew what to do; he shall advise me," said Mrs. Hay. "Sit down, young woman, and wait my pleasure to let you go."

Lord George appeared, looking more dissipated than ever. He entered with a quick step, and exclaimed,

"Ah! how do, aunt? I have come to ask you to lend me—"

He broke off abruptly as he beheld Mabel.

"Ah!" he said, almost directly, "this is a strange meeting. Is it possible that I see my little nymph of the steamboat?" adding in French, "Is there anything I can do for you with Mrs. Hay? Speak in French, as she does not know the language."

"O, yes," answered Mabel, who was an excellent French scholar. "I am with a dressmaker now, and I brought something here. A few handkerchiefs are missing, and Mrs. Hay accuses me of stealing them. Indeed, I know nothing of them. Tell her, if you please, that I am incapable of such an act."

Lord George nodded.

Mrs. French Hay looked from one to the other with the utmost curiosity. To hear a milliner speak pure Parisian French was indeed startling, and to find that she was acquainted with her favourite scamp of a nephew was more extraordinary still.

"What is the matter?" asked Lord George Lumley.

Mrs. Hay explained to him what had happened, favouring him with her view of the case.

"My dear aunt," he replied, "you have made one of your pet blunders; you have, indeed."

"What do you know of this person?"

"Only that she is highly respectable. She was apprenticed to a dressmaker in Boulogne, and made some things for some ladies I knew, who could not praise her too highly."

"What is the value of the missing things, ma'am?" asked Mabel, who could hardly help smiling at her defender's fiction.

"About five guineas," replied Mrs. French Hay. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I will undertake to give you that sum in three days, or bring back the handkerchiefs. If they are lost, of course I cannot do so ; I hope that they are only mislaid. In any case, you shall be no loser."

"This young lady will keep her word," said Lord George.

"I must consent to this arrangement, I suppose, because I can't help myself," mused Mrs. Hay.

Mabel expressed her thanks, and looked gratefully at Lord George, who had skilfully extricated her from a dilemma.

"You can go," Mrs. Hay said to her, adding to her nephew, "Sit down at the piano, George. It has just been tuned. I want to hear you play something from *Trovatore*."

"Can't indeed, aunt," he replied. "I went down to Eton yesterday, and hurt my hands playing fives with the boys. But I don't mind betting our little milliner can oblige us."

Mabel being silently appealed to, said,

"You must excuse me ; I shall be so late."

"O, then you do play?" observed Lord George. Now I shall not let you go until you have favoured us with some of Verdi's music: 'Il balen,' the Miserere,' 'Ah, che la morte,' or whatever you please."

"Have I your permission, ma'am?" Mabel asked, looking at Mrs. Hay.

"My nephew does such extraordinary things, and cares nothing for offending against propriety. I suppose you must play if you can, only be careful of the instrument, and do not thump," replied Mrs. Hay.

Mabel was anxious to show her that she was accomplished, and when Lord George placed the music-stool for her, and opened the piano, she sat down.

"Do you want music?" he asked. "There is a heap here, though what it is I don't know."

"No, thanks," replied Mabel. "I know every line of the *Traviata* and *Trovatore* by heart, I think."

And she began to play with exquisite pathos and expression some of the most charming selections from the above-named operas.

Lord George was in ecstasies; and even Mrs. Hay softened.

"You talk French like a native, you play like a professional," she said, "and do I know not what besides, and yet you are a milliner. I cannot understand it."

"May I go now?" asked Mabel.

"I will see you part of the way home," said Lord George.

"Thank you, I am quite capable of taking care

of myself, and I beg you will stay with Mrs. Hay," answered Mabel.

"Certainly ; stay where you are, George," exclaimed Mrs. Hay.

Mabel wished them both good-night, and left the apartment. Lord George cast an amorous look after her, and stifled an exclamation of annoyance which would have shocked his aunt, had the profanity come to her delicate ears.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN BAD COMPANY.

HAVING left the dress and the box, Mabel returned, unencumbered, and travelled by omnibus as far as the Blackfriars-road, when she got out to call at the house in which Lotty Leigh and Fanny Lawson resided, thinking that she might have left the handkerchiefs there, and hoping that they would return them to her.

Oddly enough she met the girls standing in the same place where she had seen them during the early part of the evening ; and, to her surprise, they moved away, as if they did not wish to see her.

Not to be baffled in that manner, she ran after and overtook them near a public-house, which they were about to enter.

Seeing that they could not escape an interview with her, Fanny Lawson turned round, exclaiming,

“ O, is it you ? How did you get on about the dress ? ”

“ I am in great trouble,” replied Mabel, out of breath with running.

“ What has happened ? Would not the dress fit ? ” asked Lotty.

"It is not that ; I have lost the handkerchiefs ; and I thought I might have dropped them in your place. They were folded up in the dress, and may have fallen out when you took it up."

"That I'm sure they didn't," answered Fanny Lawson quickly ; "I don't remember seeing them at all. Are you sure you brought them ?"

"Quite. I recollect putting them in the box. O, what shall I do?" exclaimed Mabel, almost crying with vexation at the anticipation of the distress which this loss would entail upon her.

"It is no use your botherin' us," said Fanny rudely. "Why don't you go home ?"

As she spoke a handkerchief fell from her pocket on the pavement, and the light of the lamps belonging to the public-house showed Mabel that it was one of the missing ones.

Stooping down with a cry of joy, she picked it up, and exclaimed,

"O, how could you say what you did ? Here is one of the handkerchiefs ; and if you have one you must have the rest. But I suppose you are having a joke with me."

Fanny made a snatch at it ; but Mabel jerked it away, resolutely determined not to give it up.

"What business have you with my property ?" said Fanny, purple with rage ; "can I not have a handkerchief like those you speak of ?"

"Yes ; but here are the initials I worked myself," answered Mabel, pointing triumphantly to the corner.

"Go home, I tell you, and don't make a fuss

Two gentlemen at this moment came by arm-in-arm, and seeing a dispute between some women, they stopped out of curiosity and listened.

"You have robbed me, and I shall tell Mrs. Leigh so," said Mabel.

"What is the matter?" asked one gentleman, looking earnestly at Mabel.

"She is a friend of ours," answered Fanny Lawson impudently, "and we have got to divide some money a gentleman gave us; and because she does not think her share enough, she accuses me of stealing her handkerchief. Don't believe a word she says, for she's the artfullest thing out, young as she is. If you let her talk to you she'll tell you that she's a milliner, and a virtuous girl; but the police know her about here as well as they do us."

"O, how can you say such a thing?" replied Mabel, almost stupefied by such an accusation.

"What is your name?" asked the gentleman, taking Mabel on one side, and looking searchingly into her eyes.

"Mabel Gray," was her answer.

The gentleman trembled visibly.

"What else have you to tell me about yourself?" he demanded.

"I have been at school in France, and am now living on this side of the water, because my father has deserted me."

"A likely story!" cried Fanny Lawson; "she's living in the same house as my lady friend's mother, and she can't deny it."

"Is that true?" asked her interrogator.

"Yes," answered Mabel ; "but—"

The gentleman's countenance became very grave.

Interrupting her, he exclaimed,

"Wait one moment."

Going to a lamp-post, he tore out a page from his pocket-book, and wrote hastily on it for about a minute and a half. Then he folded something up in the paper, and putting it into Mabel's hand, said,

"Read what I have written when I am gone. Let me shake you by the hand. That will do. Good-bye, child."

Taking his friend's arm, he walked on quickly, the traces of severe agitation being visible on his face.

"What's he given you?" asked Fanny.

Mabel kept the paper crumpled up in her hand, and made no answer.

Actuated by some indefinable impulse, she ran after the two men, but was unable to find them. The fact was they had taken a cab at the corner of the street, and were out of sight.

Uttering a deep sigh, Mabel stopped, and found that she had given Fanny and her companion the slip, and feeling curious as to the contents of the piece of paper which had been so mysteriously slipped into her hand, she did what she had never done before—she entered a public-house by herself, and calling for a glass of stout, unfolded the paper.

The first thing that met her gaze was a bank-note for twenty pounds. This she put in her pocket, fearing to attract the attention of some rough, sus-

picious-looking fellows who were standing about before the bar.

The note was brief, and to the following effect:

“MY CHILD,—You have this evening by a strange chance met your father—that father whose desertion you deplore. I take this opportunity of saying that misfortune prevented me keeping the appointment I made with you. Enclosed is a note for twenty pounds. May it help you to gain a more honest and creditable living than at present, is my earnest wish. Your lamentable condition and mode of life, you must know, prevents any intercourse springing up between us.—Believe in the good wishes of your father,
GRANVILLE GRAY.”

Mabel's brain reeled.

This cruel note caused her to receive a terrible shock. O, how blind she had been not to recognise that long-expected parent! and how she blamed herself for holding any communication with such women as Fanny Lawson and Lotty!

The falsehoods so unblushingly told by the former had acted to her prejudice with her father, and he, suspecting her to be a common woman of the town, refused to have anything to do with her.

For some time she stood oblivious of all around her.

Her face crimsoned as she thought of the injurious and damaging estimate her father had formed of her, and she longed—O, so ardently!—for an opportunity of meeting him again, and disabusing his

mind of the idea that he had cause to be ashamed of his daughter.

In a large city like London it was only by the merest accident that she could meet him again, and to search for him was like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay.

She had no hesitation in keeping the money he had given her, because she knew that it would be of service to her perhaps in many ways. At length she recovered herself sufficiently to be able to go home.

Mrs. Leigh was sitting up for her, much surprised at her long absence. Annie had gone to bed early, thinking that a good night's rest would do her good.

As she entered, Mrs. Leigh said to her,

"How long you have been! and how ill you look!"

"I wonder that I am alive," answered Mabel. "God knows I have had worry enough to kill me this evening."

And she proceeded to tell Mrs. Leigh all that had happened to her.

"Do not be alarmed at the loss of the handkerchiefs," she said in conclusion; "the twenty pounds given me by my father will be more than sufficient to pay for them."

"This is a most extraordinary tale you have told me," replied Mrs. Leigh; "but I believe you, my child. O that girl of mine! she seems destined to be a curse not only to me but to all who come in contact with her."

"You are satisfied that I have told you the truth?" said Mabel. "There is my father's letter.

How kind he was! He spoke in a soft tone, and I could see that he was grieved to the heart at thinking I was unworthy of his love."

Mrs. Leigh read the letter, and after a pause observed, "I do not see why you should grieve about your father; he should not have acted so hastily."

"But Lotty's friend made such misrepresentations."

"He should have doubted *her* word."

"I could do anything for him. If my father would only see me, I should be able to remove the prejudice which he has imbibed against me."

"I fear," answered Mrs. Leigh, "that your father, Mabel, though a gentleman, is one of those who lead riotous and extravagant lives. Certainly, after his treatment of you I should not grieve at losing his love. He left you to your own resources when you arrived in London; and if you really were what he thinks you are, he would be more to blame for it than you."

Mabel began to cry.

Mrs. Leigh advised her to retire to her room, as she was greatly excited, and rest would be of the utmost service to her.

She did so, and soon fell into a sound slumber.

The next day she gave Mrs. Leigh the note for twenty pounds, and begged her to go to Mrs. French Hay and pay her whatever she demanded for the handkerchiefs.

Embracing her with every demonstration of affection, Mrs. Leigh said,

"I know not how to thank you. If Mrs. Hay

had pushed us to extremities and we could not pay, you would have been charged with the theft, and you would in self-defence have been obliged to denounce my unhappy daughter and her companion. That they would have been convicted, and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment, I cannot doubt. You have saved Lotty from the consequences of her sinful behaviour, and I sincerely thank you for your generosity."

Mrs. Leigh had not been gone long before Annie heard a knock at the door, and answering the summons, received a note from a commissionaire, which was addressed to "The young lady employed by Mrs. Leigh, who waited on Mrs. French Hay last night."

"Here is a singular letter!" exclaimed Annie, giving it to Mabel. "It is evidently for you. Perhaps it has some reference to that unfortunate affair you were telling me about, and to settle which mother has this morning gone to Mrs. Hay. Don't be nervous, open it leisurely. The man has gone away, saying he was not told to wait for an answer."

With trembling fingers Mabel opened the letter, and was greatly astonished at its contents. The writer was Lord George Lumley. The letter began in this way :

"To the fair Unknown.

"If I had the extreme felicity of knowing your name I should not address you in this vague manner; but as I have no means at present of finding out the appellation your godfathers and godmothers had the

good taste to bestow upon you, I must content myself with hoping that we may not long be strangers to one another.

"I flatter myself I rendered you some assistance last night with the old dragon my aunt, and trust that you will not be so hard-hearted as to deny me the only reward I ask, viz. the pleasure of a few minutes' conversation with you. My name, I believe, you have heard. I am the most devoted of your admirers, and will prove my admiration—would that I might say love!—when we meet, should you grant me an interview.

"I will wait for you this evening at the corner of the street in which I learn from my aunt that your employer lives, and I hope at seven o'clock to meet you. Pray, my dear young lady, do not think I am one of those who would trifle with your feelings. I have too much regard and affection for you to do anything of the sort: a few moments' conversation will convince you of my sincerity.—Believe me,

"Ever yours most sincerely,

"L."

"Who is your correspondent?" asked Annie.

"A gentleman I met at Mrs. Hay's last night," replied Mabel, blushing.

"He wants you to meet him, I suppose."

"Yes."

"You will not be so silly as to do so?"

"I don't know," replied Mabel; "I must think the matter over. If he is in society, as I believe, he might give me news of my father."

Looking at her disdainfully, Annie said, "I should have thought that the fate of my poor sister would have been a sufficient warning to you."

"What do you mean? Do you dare to place me on a level with—with—"

"That poor deluded creature?" supplied Annie. "No; I merely warn you. It is easy to fall, but very difficult, if not impossible, to rise. See here: I have remarked an advertisement in a paper which might suit you, if mother decides not to keep you any longer, as she may, after what occurred yesterday. Shall I read it to you?"

Mabel nodded her head.

Annie read:

"A sensible, pleasant-mannered lady, about twenty or twenty-five, wanted immediately in a gentleman's family, where three widow ladies reside, as their companion. She must be tall, cheerful, not inclined to make troubles of trifles, and able to appreciate a quiet but happy home. An orphan preferred. Salary twenty-five pounds. Apply first, by letter, to M. D., post-office, Ealing."

"That ought to do for you," she continued, "because you are practically an orphan. It is just the thing for you; or if that will not suit you, there is this one for a governess, but the salary is only thirteen pounds a-year."

"Thank you," replied Mabel proudly. "If your mother, as you seem to suppose, does not choose to keep me any longer, I daresay I can do something better than that for myself."

"That is the effect, I fear, of my wretched sister's teaching," said Annie.

"I beg that you will not talk to me in that way: you have no right to do so!" exclaimed Mabel, almost crying. "I shall act as I think fit, and do not care about your advice. When I want it I will ask for it."

"O, you need not give yourself airs!" replied Annie.

Mabel got up and left the room, seeking her own chamber, and passed the remainder of the time which had to elapse before Mrs. Leigh's return in meditating upon the course of action which she ought to pursue.

CHAPTER IX.

TRYING HIS LUCK.

HORACE BRADY tried every imaginable way of getting money—that is to say, every honest means. We have said that no one would employ him in the City, and he tried to write short tales and verses for various periodicals. He was even bold enough to commence a burlesque upon the old classical subject of Perseus and Andromeda, of which the following is a fair specimen :

ANDROMEDA.

Chained to the rock, the ever-restless sea
Laughs at my woe, and mocks my misery.
Hunger gnaws me—'tis an-gnawing, very ;
No food to eat—O, for a glass of sherry !
Stay ! what is here ? An oyster, I declare ;
Periwinkles, too ; uninviting fare !
And here a whelk—confound the low thing !
It fills my very soul with loathing.
Ah me ! I sigh, and though not big, my sighs
Will make the monster open wide his eyes.
How cold the wind blows through that dreadful rift !
To keep me warm I cannot make a shift.
What's this green stuff here ? A goodly stock
Of sea-weed growing, gratis, on the rock.
I'm neither wife nor widow, and my needs
Do not, as yet, include the use of weeds.

[*The Monster appears.*

Song : ANDROMEDA.

Air : "Goody, please to moderate," &c.

O monster, please to moderate the motion of your tongue,
Nor lick those lips at prospect of a meal :
Remember that for murder most likely you'll be hung,
Or, like Ixion, fastened to a wheel.

Dear me,

Hear me,

Then perhaps you'll fear me :

Do not eat me,

Kindly treat me,

O, pity try to feel.

O monster, &c.

If I call out for aid he'll only laugh :

I'd a deal better try a little chaff.

It's rather rough at sea, so I can tell

You think yourself a very heavy swell.

What hair and eyes, what teeth and hands and nails !

I'm fond of music—pray go through your scales.

Excuse me if I've used a little freedom,

Woman, I have heard, should never be dumb.

When he had finished this highly-original composition, he did what he ought to have done at first : he inquired of a theatrical bookseller if the subject had ever been done, and found that it had, fifteen years before, by Planché, so that he had nothing for it but to put his ms. in his portmanteau and look upon it as so much labour lost.

With the publishers he was not very successful. His tales were not accepted, and the copy was only obtained by dint of repeated calls and much perseverance.

Then he became sentimental, and wrote pieces

like the following, which were consigned to the waste-paper-basket as soon as looked at.

THE SHADE OF MY DARLING.

The shade of my darling is still by my side,
And he smiles with a tender compassion on me,
His love everlasting, his dearest, his bride,
Soon with his bright spirit united to be.

The angel destroying has striven in vain
To tear us asunder and bury our love ;
For all the night long my dear phantom I strain
In my arms, which would rend him from heav'n above.

My angel, my sweet one, more loved now that death
Has sifted our passion of its grossness of earth,
I kiss thy loved shadow, and with my last breath
I pant for a union of heavenly birth.

My dearest, I'm with thee, I fly by thy side,
The joys of the blessed are now all our own ;
Thou never shalt part with thine immortal bride,
Who to thee in Paradise fondly has flown.

When he found that he could make nothing by either prose or poetry, he turned his attention seriously to the proposal made him by Major Rastock. He was ashamed to see Mabel again unless he could repay her the money he had borrowed.

One evening, when his finances were at a low ebb, he pulled his hat over his brows and walked towards Piccadilly. In this frequented thoroughfare he kicked his foot against something. Stooping down, he beheld a purse and picked it up ; not knowing whose it was or to whom to give it, he put it in his pocket and walked quickly on. He was anxious in the extreme to examine this windfall.

In his desperate condition he did not feel any compunction in appropriating the money, should there be any, to his own use; but the question he debated in his mind was this: when could he open the purse and look at its contents, without being watched and exciting suspicion?

If the purse contained a respectable sum—and it was heavy—he would be respited; he could do without that terrible Major Rastock, who, unscrupulous man of the world that he was, would make him a murderer, in order to gain that inheritance which, had Mr. Brady made a will, would have been his by law, as it now was by right.

He was a member of a club called the “Walpole,” situated in Regent-street, near Waterloo-place. Although he was so wretchedly poor, he was still well-dressed, and a light overcoat which he wore concealed the absence of his watch and chain, which he had long ago pawned to supply his pressing necessities. His gloves too hid the naked fingers, which had once held two rings set with stones of price; and it was difficult to tell from Horace Brady’s appearance that he was the desperate ruined man that he was in reality.

To the Walpole Club he would go; and turning round, he directed his steps towards Regent-street.

The club-porter bowed as he entered, and Horace walked into the dining-room, ordering some oysters, a dozen prawns, and a pint-bottle of Moët’s pink champagne.

He knew that his credit with the steward was sufficiently good to enable him to obtain credit for

the repast he was going to partake of, should the purse, contrary to his expectations, prove empty.

Sitting down at a table in a remote corner, he produced the purse from his pocket, where it had been securely resting.

It was a handsome one, made of morocco leather. Opening it, he saw that the side spaces were filled with gold. Hastily counting the pieces, he found that he had seventeen sovereigns.

In the centre compartment was a little bundle of bank-notes. Examination showed him that these were three ten-pound notes and one for five.

He was, then, the happy possessor of upwards of fifty pounds. There was no card, not even a scrap of paper, in the purse, to tell him to whom the purse belonged ; so that, had he been desirous of restoring the property to its proper owner, he would have been unable to do so, unless he had advertised in the daily journals ; and in his forlorn condition he did not feel himself under any pressing moral obligation to do this.

The supper he had ordered quickly made its appearance ; and when he had eaten the prawns, the oysters, and drank the wine, he felt his courage return, and went into the smoking-room, to see if he could meet with some old friends and beguile an hour or two in pleasant conversation.

The first man he met was Captain Saunders, in the 8th Hussars ; and as he had been on particularly intimate terms with him, Horace did not hesitate to shake hands with him.

Captain Saunders looked worn and haggard, and

extended his hand in a sluggish, languid manner, totally different from his usually brisk and hearty way of greeting a friend.

"What is the matter?" inquired Horace.

"I am a little hipped; that is all," answered Saunders.

"Late hours, wine, and wantonness?"

"Not in the least. Early hours have upset me on this occasion," said the captain with a forced smile.

"How?"

"I will tell you. This morning I came into the club about twelve to write some letters, and afterwards strolled into the card-room."

"So early?"

"Yes."

"Was there any one playing?"

"No one; but I was followed by that fellow they call the Black Prince. What is his name?—Don José de Carreras."

"The Portuguese?"

"I believe him to be so. He challenged me to play at *écarté*. I did so, and lost a thousand pounds, which, to tell you the truth, Brady, I don't know how on earth to pay, unless I sell my commission."

"It is a large sum," said Horace thoughtfully.

"He holds my I O U's, which ought to have been taken up before now."

"What will you do?"

"That is precisely the question I am debating in my mind," replied Captain Saunders. "Can you lend it me?"

"I would with pleasure, dear boy," replied Horace, "if I had it; but in return for your confidence, I will tell you that I am as *au sec* as yourself. I haven't a hundred pounds in the world."

"That is always the result of plunging."

"I don't know that I have plunged heavily."

"You have been talked about," replied Saunders.

"Is your Black Prince still playing?" asked Horace.

"He is still at it, I believe."

"He has had a run, I presume. He is in the vein. Do you know, Saunders, that I have a good mind to go in and challenge him. A man's luck can't last for ever, and I may upset his pile."

"I wish to Heaven you could, because you would get back my acknowledgments, and then—"

"And then I should present them for immediate payment," said Horace, laughing.

"I should not be afraid of that."

"I would make you a present of them, and trust to your honour for their discharge when you had the ability."

"I know it, my dear fellow," cried the captain, shaking his hand with more cordiality than at first. "Try one of these Partagas, and let us go to the card-room."

"With all my heart."

Saunders, opening his cigar-case, extended it to Horace, who took one, lighted it, and followed his friend to the card-room.

The Walpole, we may state, was not the most reputable club in London. Many good men belonged

to it; but it was continually gaining fresh members and losing old ones. And for this reason:

More gambling went on at the Walpole than at any other club in London.

Men got ruined speedily, and the young and inexperienced fell a prey to those old stagers who knew how to get a living by their wits, disdaining hard and legitimate work, which they said, with some truth, never yet made anybody rich.

A crowd of men had assembled in the card-room. Only one table was occupied.

Don José de Carreras had been playing with first one man and then another since one o'clock, when he had commenced with Captain Saunders.

He had been invincible. A pile of gold and notes had accumulated in a corner, until it grew so plethoric that he was at last obliged to cram it into a hat, over which it flowed, flooding the wide brim, and towering up a monument of wealth.

The interest which every one took in Don José and his game prevented any other parties being formed.

The Portuguese, if this was his correct nationality, was a thin, short, wizened man, with hollow cheeks, a sallow complexion, short dark hair, fiery eyes, thin pursed-up lips, on which sat a smile of triumph.

His opponent, as Captain Saunders and Horace Brady entered the card-room, was an Oxford man not long emancipated from University control.

Being an orphan, and the son of rich parents, he had on attaining his majority come into a handsome

fortune, which he was doing his best by continuous profligacy and folly to dissipate.

It had taken his father, a City merchant, and his father before him, years to amass.

The saying, which has almost passed into a proverb in the City, that wealth never lasts for three generations, was about to hold good in his case.

Reckless and improvident as was Harley Whympier, he saw that he had not sufficient luck to fight against the overwhelming good-fortune of the Portuguese.

Throwing down a bank-note for a hundred pounds, he exclaimed, "This shall be the last, with your permission, Don José, if I lose."

"You will exercise your pleasure," answered Don José de Carreras with a slight foreign accent.

Harley Whympier bowed.

The game was *écarté*.

"Perhaps the luck will change," observed a spectator, as the cards were slowly and with precision dealt by Don José, who was as calm as fate.

The game proceeded, and Mr. Whympier marked four points against Don José's two.

Public feeling in the club was against the Portuguese, not because he was disliked, or that there was anything known against his character, he being honest and a man of property, but because he had won so largely.

Whympier had lost about three thousand pounds, and no trace of annoyance or disappointment was visible upon his gentlemanly and composed countenance.

Not an oath or an exclamation of annoyance had

escaped him throughout the game, which had lasted nearly two hours and a half.

He extended his hand to Horace, and said, "My star pales to-night."

"Have you lost much?" inquired Horace.

"A flea-bite."

"And yet you intend to leave off unsuccessful?"

Harley Whymper shrugged his shoulders.

"I should have done the same if I had been winning," he answered. "When a man has a little woman waiting for him, it is bad taste to keep her expecting him."

He began to deal.

"You only want the king to win," remarked Horace, as the players sorted their cards.

"Which I mark," exclaimed Don José.

Whymper had a nine, which was taken by a knave. His two trumps fell successively to the king and the queen, and the two next tricks were easily made by Don José, who then won the game.

He carelessly tossed the bank-note on the top of the hat, and looked around him.

Whymper got up.

"I must go," he said; "it is impossible to play against such luck."

"Impossible," echoed the spectators.

"Who is the next victim?" asked somebody.

This question raised a laugh.

"Believe me, gentlemen, I am disgusted with my continued luck," said Don José.

"Are you not tired?" inquired some one.

"Perhaps I am a little," he answered. "But my

position is so peculiar—I have won from everybody to-day, and do not feel myself at liberty to go away so long as there remains any one to challenge me.”

There was a dead silence.

“ If no one defies me, I shall gladly quit the place I have held so long.”

The silence continued.

Don José de Carreras rose as if to depart.

Actuated by an irresistible impulse Horace Brady exclaimed, “ I challenge you, sir, to play with me, if you will accept a modest stake and the terms I am about to propose.”

Don José regarded Horace with surprise.

Resuming his seat, he replied with well-bred courtesy, “ I am very much at your service, sir.”

Horace was fascinated by the sight of the hateful of gold and notes, which, if Fortune favoured him, might in a short time be his.

Ruined as he was, desperate as he had been a few hours before, he indulged a hope that he might, by a grand *coup*, retrieve his shattered fortunes.

At all events, he could but lose the money he had just picked up; and if the worst came to the worst, he had Major Rastock to fall back upon.

His hand trembled a little as he fumbled in his pocket for the purse.

The idea struck him that some one of the gentlemen then standing round the table might be the loser of it, and then what would be his position ?

But he was in the humour to risk all things, and he did not hesitate long to bring out the purse, and

with as steady a hand as he could he counted out fifty pounds.

"I have but fifty pounds with me, senor," he said, "and that I am going to stake against an equal sum of yours."

"I am ready," replied the Portuguese.

"You will perhaps be astonished at the terms I am going to propose to you."

"Whatever they are, I accept them before hearing them."

"That is well. Here are fifty pounds. If I win the first game at *écarté* I play with you, I shall double my stake and play for one hundred. If I win again, I shall double again; and so on, until I have won all that you have gained, or I lose that which I gain from you as well as my fifty pounds. Is that agreeable to you, Don José?"

"Perfectly so."

"How much have you gained?"

The Portuguese made a calculation on a piece of paper with the aid of a pencil.

After the expiration of a few seconds he exclaimed, "Nearly thirteen thousand pounds. Consequently, to break my bank and win that which I have, you must beat me eight times in succession. The game is scarcely fair as far as I am concerned; but as money is no object to me, and I don't wish any gentleman here whose acquaintance I have the honour to possess to set me down as a professional gambler, I agree to your proposition, risking twelve thousand pounds to gain fifty."

A murmur of applause greeted this speech.

Horace took the place just vacated by Harley Whympier.

The waiter brought some fresh packs of cards.

Captain Saunders looked pale, and he whispered to Horace :

" You have done a stupid thing. Who ever heard of a man losing eight times successively at *écarté*? You must be in rare form to do such a thing."

" I am inspired to-night," replied Horace in the same tone.

" Your inspiration will lose your fifty pounds."

" We shall see."

The crowd became wildly enthusiastic.

This singular struggle excited every one strangely, and it was clear that the sympathy of almost every one was with Horace Brady.

" Bring in some wine," he said to a waiter as he cut the cards.

" An ace," cried Don José.

" You deal," replied Horace, who was as calm and collected as if he had been playing for shilling points.

The domestic brought him some champagne in a silver tankard. He drained it to the bottom, and felt his heart leap in his bosom.

" I shall win," he said to himself.

The Portuguese dealt, and turned up the king, which he promptly marked.

" Ah, dear boy, my bad luck has gone over to you," observed Harley Whympier, who, in spite of his engagement, stopped to see the issue of this singular contest.

If Horace lost once, it was all over.

He had no more money to play with, and Don José would be the victor.

Betting became brisk, and as much as thirty and forty to one was laid against Horace winning the entire eight times. Don José soon scored four to nothing.

"Four, love!" cried Whymper, who thought he saw a chance of winning back something. "I will lay seven to four on Don José."

"And I," cried Captain Saunders, "will take you."

"To how much?"

"To four hundred."

Whymper exclaimed, "It is a bet!" and he stood to lose seven hundred pounds on the first game.

But this was nothing at the Walpole. This sort of thing went on there nearly every day.

It was often said, that if the Walpole did not exist, many well-known men in London could not.

But this was satire.

In satire there is always some exaggeration, yet there is generally a substratum of truth.

"Four, love," cried Horace. "My chance is a poor one."

"You have just time to win," observed the Portuguese, who had dealt, and was about to turn up.

"Odds against the king being there," said some one.

"Name them," said Don José.

"Fifty to thirty."

"I take you."

He turned up a card, and it was a seven.

Taking out his purse, he counted out notes for the required sum, and handed them to the man who had bet with him.

"His luck is turning," said a man near him.

This remark was prophetic.

Horace held the king, and had a good hand, by which he scored four.

The game was now four all.

Horace's supporters took courage.

"He has to win seven times before I am vanquished," said the Portuguese, who thought nothing whatever of losing the first game.

Horace grew feverishly impatient.

The suspense that he had to endure was something dreadful.

Suppose he was to win seven times and lose the eighth game, his labour would be like that of Sisypheus, whose stone always rolled down the mountain when he had got it up to the top, and so he had to begin his work over again. Or like that of Tantalus, who, standing in the shallow river, could raise the water to his lips, but never moisten his parched tongue.

The play proceeded.

Horace gained the second and third games.

In spite of his assumed indifference and his disregard for money, the Portuguese became white under his yellow skin.

Noticing this, Horace exclaimed, "Sir, you have behaved with the utmost generosity to me, and I do not wish to be eclipsed by you in courtesy. Like yourself, I should be much offended at being con-

sidered a professional gambler. If you think your luck is turning, by all means leave off playing."

"Are you afraid?" said Don José de Carreras with a slight sneer.

This was quite sufficient to arouse Horace's anger.

"No, by Jove," he said. "If I follow my inclination, I shall play until you are beaten."

He set his lips firmly together, and dealt the cards. There was an indescribable something in his manner which showed that he possessed the nervous energy which a man conscious of his own power, and certain of winning, always possesses.

Game followed game.

The luck of the Portuguese had evidently transferred itself to Horace, who could not be beaten.

Seven games he had won in succession.

The eighth and final one now commenced.

Horace's eyes wandered restlessly to the hatful of gold and notes which lay upon the table, and which would be his if he was again successful.

He had already won 6400*l*.

An immense sum—a small fortune, in fact, to a man in his desperate condition.

The Portuguese, whose deal it was, placed the cards on the table.

"I think," he said, "that it will be well for you to leave off."

"Why?" asked Horace.

"It is unwise to tempt fortune."

"Back your luck, me boy,—back your luck," said an Irish major, who stood to win something considerable in bets on his ultimate success.

Horace smiled.

"I fully intend to do so," he replied.

"You are rash," observed Don José de Carreras.

"It seems to me," continued Horace, addressing his opponent, "that it is you who are afraid."

The Portuguese's pallor deepened; rage and fear combined made him ghastly.

"Proceed," he said; "we will play to the end. I have offered you a chance, and you have refused it; if you lose all now, you must not blame my generosity, but your own folly."

"Play, sir," exclaimed Horace, who was intoxicated with the spirit of gambling.

His fortune was at flood tide, and he had the courage to seize it. The cards were dealt, and in two deals he scored five. Don José rose without having marked one, and was perfectly mad with rage.

Horace had won eight games one after the other.

Nearly thirteen thousand pounds was his.

Three or four hours ago he hadn't a penny.

Here was a reverse of fortune. The fickle goddess had given her wheel a sudden turn, and he was once more her favourite.

The spectators broke out into a storm of applause. There was clapping of hands and a chorus of bravos.

As for Horace, he scarcely heard them; he was stupefied with his sudden and unexpected success. From the position of a beggar he was elevated to that of a man of fortune.

Looking up, he said to the Portuguese:

"Can I offer you a revenge?"

Don José stifled his anger, and did not allow the gambler to overpower the gentleman.

"Thank you very much," he replied; "it is not necessary."

He bowed with perfect composure, and walked out of the club, having previously emptied his hat on to the table, where the gold and notes lay together in a confused and glittering mass.

Horace allowed his head to fall on his hands.

"Is it not a dream?" he murmured.

"Yes," replied a voice at his elbow; "but it is a golden dream."

Horace looked up and trembled.

The person who addressed him was Major Rastock.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE TOILS.

"Put your money in your pocket, and come with me," continued the Major.

"With you!" repeated Horace.

"Certainly. You are excited, and a chat with me in my chambers will calm you."

Mechanically Horace began to stuff the notes and gold into his pockets, and yielding to the Major's request, he was about to go, when Captain Saunders stopped him.

"You have forgotten your promise to me," he said.

"O, to be sure! A thousand pardons. You want your IO Us," said Horace. "They are here, somewhere."

And he began to feel, first in one pocket and then in the other.

"Another time — to-morrow. Do you not see that my young friend is excited? He must have time to cool," observed the Major.

Captain Saunders bit his lips.

"Yes, to-morrow, if you please," exclaimed Horace.

Captain Saunders bowed, though he had rage in

his heart. This inscrutable and mysterious Major Rastock had stepped in, and was doing what he had himself intended to do.

The Major slipped his arm into that of Horace, and led him away.

In the passage he exclaimed :

“All men are sharks. I must protect you.”

With that easiness and good-nature which always prevented him from saying No, and which had been fatal to him through life, Horace accompanied the Major in a hansom to his chambers.

These were magnificently furnished.

Splendid pictures of incalculable value and *objets d'art* were to be seen in every direction. The most perfect taste, aided by a lavish expenditure, had made this suite of rooms the most admirable of their kind in the world.

Placing Horace in a chair, Major Rastock touched a silver alarum, and a black servant entered with two hookahs, containing a rare and perfumed oriental tobacco unspeakably delicious to the palate and grateful to the nerves.

Horace smoked in silence.

The Major placed a bottle of champagne and a glass by his side, and he drank freely.

“Your uncle is ill !” he exclaimed.

“Ill ? I understood from you that he was a man in good health,” replied Horace.

“He was, but a mysterious disease, which baffles the skill of the first physicians, has attacked him.”

“Do you know him ?”

“I am his most intimate friend.”

Horace began to understand the nature of this disease.

He shuddered.

"Is that tobacco to your taste?" inquired the Major.

"Perfectly."

"And the wine?"

"Delicious!"

The Major smiled.

"Shall I while away an hour," he asked, "in telling you a little story? It is the history of a ragged boy, who was cast adrift on the streets of London."

"A boy! Can it be—"

"Yourself? You shall see. Your memory serves you insomuch as it enables you to recollect a large country house. Can you not remember a time, before you found yourself with a private tutor, preparatory to going to Eton?"

"I have a vague recollection," said Horace musingly.

"Of what?"

"O, it is a hideous dream—a nightmare. It cannot be true."

"Let me recapitulate certain events of a boy's life, and perhaps you will acknowledge the correctness of the details."

"I will listen to you with pleasure," replied Horace.

He fixed his eyes upon Major Rastock, as does the bird when fascinated by the serpent.

"Pardon me a moment. I wish to give an order to Mezroul."

Again the silver alarum tinkled.

Mezrou, the black servant we have alluded to before, entered.

Speaking in a tone so low as to be inaudible to Horace, Major Rastock said,

“Have you dispatched my telegram?”

“James has gone with it, sir,” answered Mezrou.

“That will do.”

Had Horace Brady overheard this brief dialogue, he would not have understood what was said, as it was carried on in Arabic.

“Now, dear boy,” exclaimed the Major, when they were again alone, “you shall hear my little history. It is all true, and I beg you will pardon me if I am digressive: I shall not be tedious; but I have a way of telling a story which I got into when I was an author.”

“An author?”

“Certainly. Is there anything odd in that? I have been everything.”

Horace’s astonishment increased.

Major Rastock was truly a wonderful man.

He spoke in a musical voice which was not without its charm, and said,

“‘Here yer are, sir; here yer are, sir! Throw a copper to poor Jack, yer honour. Here yer are, sir!’

“To those who were in the habit of crossing the old Hungerford suspension-bridge at low water these sounds were familiar.

“Time has made great changes in a few years. The suspension-bridge has been taken away, the mud-

larks have gone higher up or lower down stream; Hungerford-market—with its music-hall which never would pay, its fish-shops, its penny-ice mart, and its fruiterers' stalls in those gloomy arcades—has given place to a magnificent structure which forms one of the most splendid termini of our extraordinary railway system.

“It was twelve o'clock. The spring morning was fine, bright, and genial. My story opens in the days of the old market.

“The suspension-bridge had its fair share of patronage, bestowed by those foot-passengers who were anxious to cross from the Middlesex to the Surrey shore, or the reverse. Some hurried along, as if pressed for time; others lounged lazily over the parapet, gazing upon the shipping in the river, watching with wondering or admiring eyes the swift steamers thronged with passengers, which skimmed over the surface of the water like things of life; others, again, kept their eyes fixed upon a number of boys, perhaps a dozen altogether, who disported themselves in the mud for the questionable gratification of their patrons.

“Incessantly the shrill cries with which I have commenced my little history arose and smote the ears of the on-lookers with a deafening din.

‘Here yer are, sir; here yer are, sir! Shy a copper to poor Jack, yer honour! Here yer are, sir!’

“Occasionally the exertions of the lads would be rewarded by the bestowal of a solitary copper coin, presumably a halfpenny,—for that sum afforded as

much amusement to the spectators as one of a larger size and greater value.

"When the donation fell into the mud, it sank at once from view in the bluish-black clayey substance which lines the banks of the Thames, leaden rather than silvery in the metropolitan district.

"The object of the thrower was to cast his charitable mite as far from the noisy struggling group of boys as possible; and undoubtedly the fun of the whole thing consisted in seeing the ragged little urchins run at the top of their speed to the spot where the money had vanished from their view, and plunge their arms into the viscous mud, up to their shoulders almost, in their frantic efforts to make a capture. So have we seen adventurous youth hunt for clams in the mudbanks of canals and large ponds.

"When the money was found by the luckiest or the most clever of the clamorous ragamuffins, it was held up at arm's-length in triumph, and subsequently relegated to the depths of a dirty pocket, to be presently drawn forth and cleansed in the rising tide.

"Sometimes it was presented to a hesitating shopman as a legal tender, and by him dubiously accepted in return for sundry creature comforts, which it was his mission here below to dispense to the hungry if not the naked, though many of his customers were little better clothed than was Adam when he rejoiced in the possession of the traditional fig-leaf.

"Jackets had been left, hidden away in safe corners, by our mudlarks. Shoes were also superfluous luxuries not required in their savoury avoca-

tion. It is doubtful if any of them knew what socks were; ragged shirts they had, as well as greasy caps; however poor your London cadger, he has always a cap. That is a peculiarity of mendicancy. A waistcoat, too, is an indispensable article of attire to a poor boy, who would as soon think of going without a piece of string for a brace as be deprived of his waistcoat.

"Dirt was the distinguishing characteristic of all of them; dirt on the skin, dirt on the clothes—I could almost rise to a poetical pitch, and sing the Song of the Dirt. They were plastered with it, they reeked of it, they revelled in it; dirt was their element. They were at home in dirt, and it is my firm and unalterable opinion that they liked the taste of it.

"From long exposure to it, the mud had got hard and dry and caked upon them. When a shower of rain came, they acted the part of scavengers to one another, and scraped one another down with stray bits of wood or iron, flotsam and jetsam picked up in the bed of the river.

"Very wild, hungry-looking, eager, bird-like were these waifs and strays of humanity, these street arabs, these boys of the period. They pushed and jostled one another, they hit and kicked viciously like young horses, they glared with their young eyes, and used foul language in hoarse voices, which was not good to hear. Might was right, and the weakest went to the wall.

"In this respect they did but reflect in themselves those older and wiser by far; for in the great

world the battle is generally to the strong, and the race to the swift, though there may be proverbs to the contrary.

"The eldest of the mudlarks was not fourteen; some were as young as eight and nine. One, who was perhaps eleven years of age, had been rather lucky during the morning, and was regarded by an evil-looking lad, his senior, as a fit object for plunder. But there was honour amongst the boys, if they were thieves.

"Still the hoarse cries arose, and the ever-changing crowd were solicited to divest themselves of their superfluous halfpence. A few responded to the call, and at midday the mudlarks were doing a brisk business. The trade had not been so prosperous and thriving for some days past. Dirt was looking up. Mud was in the ascendant, and refuse had been inquired for, as the writers of City articles say when speaking of securities.

"It was necessary that the mudlarks should bestir themselves, for the tide was rising, and they would soon be driven from their vantage-ground. So they redoubled their exertions, and reaped a copper harvest.

"A gentleman, who had been watching them for some time, and who had thrown them as much as sixpennyworth of halfpence, strove to throw his gifts near the lad whom I have described as being an exceptional capitalist on this eventful morning.

"Putting his hand in his pocket hurriedly to draw out some more pence, he took out along with the money a morocco-leather pocket-book, and in the hurry of the moment it fell into the river mud.

" There was a rush and scuffle. Slipping through the crowd with the sinuosity of an eel, the lad whom he had distinguished made for the shore as rapidly as the mud, into which he sank almost up to the knees at every step, would allow him.

" In his hand was the pocket-book. Of this fact the gentleman was satisfied, because he saw it plainly.

" While he stood for an instant perplexed, and not knowing what to do, a voice at his elbow exclaimed, 'This way, sir; follow me. The young scamp is making off with it. We must get down to the river-bank, and intercept him before he can get to the swag-shop and make it safe.'

" Without stopping to ask who the man* who accosted him was, the gentleman gladly accepted his offer, told him so in so many words, and the two were quickly running along the bridge to the Surrey side, which was the direction the little vagabond had taken. Had the gentleman stopped to look at the person who volunteered him assistance, it is probable that he would have hesitated before trusting him; for his apparel was of the shabbiest description, his face thin, cadaverous, and unprepossessing. There are many such to be seen in the streets every day—men who do not care to work, or whom nobody will employ, ready for an odd job which will not last long or give them much trouble, most likely having hard-working wives at home, who by washing or charing contrive to keep themselves and their husbands.

" The gentleman had a military appearance; he was well but not showily dressed; quick and decisive in his manner, as if accustomed to command; nor did

any expression predominate over another in his cold and passionless face, which was stern and melancholy.

“The lad had considerably the start of his pursuers, and reached the bank before they had got to a lane leading down to the river-side by the pottery. It did not appear to be his intention to escape, for he stood still when he was in no farther danger of being plundered of his prize by his companions, and looked anxiously about him.

“He was a pretty, fair-haired boy, well-built, and tall for his age, which was between ten and twelve. He looked a good boy, though a physiognomist would have argued that he was weak of purpose, and likely to be easily led by those older and stronger-minded than himself; nor would they have been far wrong.

“His meditations were cut short by an attack made upon him from behind. He was seized by the arm and the collar at the same time, and the pocket-book was wrenched forcibly from his grasp, while he heard a voice exclaim, ‘I’ve caught the little thief, sir, and just in the nick of time; he was waiting to make a bolt, only he didn’t know which way to start; and now my collarin’ of him ’as pretty nigh put the stuns on him.’

“The gentleman, who had followed his volunteer guide as quickly as he was able, repossessed himself of the muddy pocket-book, opened it, glanced hastily at its contents as if to assure his mind of their safety, but in such a way that no one but himself could see them; and regardless of the dirt, slipped the book into the breast-pocket of his coat, and exclaimed, in

his turn, 'Let the lad go. I am not so sure that he is a thief.'

'Not a thief?' replied the man, with an incredulous stare at his young captive, and a pitying smile at the ignorance of the 'swell bloke.' 'Why, they're bred and born to it. Young as he is, I lay a bet he's done time; he's been in Tottle-fields, and he's safe on the road to a reformatory, or the New Model, at Wandsworth—that's *his* form, or I'm a Dutchman, and ought to be made to eat my 'at!'

'Not so fast, my friend,' said the gentleman. 'I have got my property back, thanks to you, you will say. I shall not deny it, and there is half-a-crown for your trouble. You have nothing more to do with the matter; therefore you can leave us alone, as I wish to speak to this lad.'

'Thank you kindly, sir,' answered the man. 'I've no wish to interfere. My name's Jinks, and I'm well known about the market, should you wish for me to give evidence against the kid, should there be anything wrong. My hadvice is, don't trust 'im. I could tell you reg'lar 'eaps of tales that would make your hair curl about these boys; but as you seem sot in his favour, why, it wouldn't be of no use. I make bold, sir, to repeat as my name's Jinks, and my house of call's the Swan at the foot of the bridge, on the 'Ungerford side.'

'Thank you for your information; I shall not forget you,' answered the gentleman, who looked at Mr. Jinks straight in the face, until he walked slowly away, and left him and the boy alone together.

"The noise of the remaining mudlarks was still

audible as they exclaimed, 'Chuck 'em out, sir ! Here yer are, sir !' with unvarying monotony. They resembled wild-beasts in this, that they had not much choice of sounds.

'My boy,' said the gentleman in a kind tone, 'I don't believe you intended to steal my property, and I should like to hear what you have to say about it. Come, walk up here with me, and we will have a talk, shall we ? Don't be afraid, I am not going to harm you.'

"There was a sort of causeway, along which they walked side by side, the gentleman making no attempt to detain the boy, the latter not endeavouring to run away.

'I'm sure, sir,' he said, 'I could have got away easily with it if I had been so minded. I might have 'id it in the mud, or passed it to a pal, or done a 'undred things so as you should never have see it again. I wanted to give it to you ; for I'd a blessed sight rather go on the square than be in a cross thing, and stand the chance of getting lagged for doing of it.'

'If I divest your speech of your slang, you mean to say that you are really honest if you have a chance, and that you never steal unless you are driven to it.'

'I never did in all my born days, sir, unless I was 'ard drove to it,' replied the boy earnestly.

'What do they call you ? I suppose you have a name, though it is doubtful if you were ever baptised.'

'Some call me Patsey, and some Nix,' said the boy ; 'but it's in general Patsey. I ain't Irish, though, and don't know why I'm so called.'

‘Ah, the old story, — no father, no mother, I suppose,’ remarked the gentleman. ‘Perhaps abandoned when an infant, or maybe a foundling. Well, Patsey, I should like to know more of you? Come and see me this evening at six o’clock. Do you know Porchester-terrace, Bayswater? You do not? Then you must find it out. Go on till you come to Rochester House, and there ask for Mr. Alfred Cotsworth; but stay, here is my card. If you cannot read, ask some one to do so for you. Hold out your hand. See—five shillings; hold them tight. I would give you more, but I don’t think you would know what to do with the money, and your companions might rob you. Mind, I shall expect you.’

“They had stopped near a low-looking river-side public-house, by the side of which was an alley which led up to the main road. Out of the window was a man looking at the water. He saw the gentleman give the boy some silver, and his interest was fixed directly. A boy who had been mudlarking with the one called Patsey had seen him talking to some one well-dressed, and thinking that something might be cadged he ran after them; and overtaking them just as Mr. Alfred Cotsworth was taking leave of his young friend, exclaimed, ‘Can you spare a copper kind sir? I’m very hungry, kind gentleman, sir; you won’t miss a copper, sir. I ain’t broke my fast this blessed day, without the word of a lie, capting. Do, sir, kind gentleman, sir, spare a copper for a poor boy!’

“Disgusted at the whining tone in which this canting professional speech was uttered, Mr. Cots-

worth was about to turn away without making any reply; but on second thoughts he took out a sixpence, and said, as he held it up between his fingers, 'What will you do for it?'

"The lad's eyes sparkled with pleasure as he replied,

'I'll stand on my 'ed in the mud, sir; I'll eat a farden candle wick and all; I'll caterwheel from here to the bridge; I'll swaller a ha'penny buster and a pint of porter in arf a minute; I'll dive down, and bring up a brick in my mouth; I'll—'

"How long the catalogue might have gone on, it is difficult to say; but Mr. Cotsworth did not seem desirous of putting his numerous accomplishments to the test, for he tossed the sixpence cavalierly towards him, and giving Patsey a friendly nod, walked rapidly away.

"The second lad picked up the money, and stood regarding it in silent ecstasy. The man who had witnessed the scene from the window of the public-house came out upon the strand, and touching Patsey on the shoulder, exclaimed,

'That swell bloke give you some posh. How much?'

"The boy looked up with a terrified expression of countenance, and tried to escape by ducking under his arm; but the man was too quick for him, catching him by the arms as he did, and opening his hand, in which the money still lay.

'Five bobs!' was his comment.

"With considerable reluctance Patsey allowed his money to be taken from him, and deposited in the man's pocket.

"This fellow was a well-known character. Short and thick, with a bull head, overhanging brows, prodigious strength, some presence of mind, much coolness, and plenty of impudence,—Captain Slog, as he was called, was at all times a formidable antagonist.

"He had been convicted more than once, and had been under the surveillance of the police with a ticket-of-leave. He would have called himself a downy cove, and told you he was up to every move on the board; and he would not have exaggerated one bit, for he had forgotten more before he was twenty than most men know at the age of fifty.

"The boy who had obtained sixpence from the gentleman was tall and thin, with hollow cheeks, small ferrety eyes, and an expression of great cunning. He appeared to be acquainted with the burglar Captain Slog; for he exclaimed in his usual whining voice, which, from a peculiar burr about it, had acquired him the name of Humming Bob among his companions,

'I say, capting, let us stand in. I'll take one for my share.'

'One on the nob you shall have, and welcome, young run-to-seed,' answered the captain, with a grim smile. 'But the white-bait is mine; isn't it, my interesting hinfant?'

"This remark was addressed to Patsey, who, with tears in his eyes, stood bewailing his loss. He made no answer; but Humming Bob took up the cudgels on his behalf, saying,

'You think becos you's as big as you's ugly that you'll have it all your own way. I wish I could see

a copper. If I could, you'd cheese it quick enough, I'll lay odds, and no gammon about it.'

"O, that's your private opinion, Mr. Ill-weed," answered the burglar, regarding him complacently. 'I call you Ill-weed, because ill weeds grow apace, and you've knocked your tailor out of time altogether. Suppose we have some soft tommy, cheese, and a pot of cooper atween the lot of us, and talk matters over quietly; how would that suit your complaint, eh? Does your belly cry cupboard?'

'I don't know about hissen,' replied Humming Bob, pointing to Patsey; 'but my stummick's always at it, and I'm on for a blow-out if you're game to stand it.'

'That's a bargain, that is,' replied Captain Slog. 'You're my hinvited guests. Perhaps you will be good enough to follow me to the saloon, while I horder the banquet.'

"The captain led the way as he had proposed; and Patsey, who was both hungry and thirsty after his exertions in the mud, followed, on the principle that half a loaf is better than no bread.

"Outside the public-house, which had the ominous sign of the Black Cap, was a pump and a small trough of water. Indicating the latter with a movement of his hand, the captain exclaimed,

'I do not wish to say anything which you may consider in the slightest degree hoffsensive, as the werry polite chaplain of Holloway gaol once observed to me on a trying occasion, but—and here is the point—I should strongly recommend the removal of a little of that dirt on your skin, if only

on sanitary grounds. You may take the 'int, or leave it, as you like. It's kindly meant; but so long as you're hinnocent of soap and water, just so long must I refuse to sit down at the same table with you.'

"Patsey thought proper to take the hint, and plunged his head and arms into the trough, while the captain looked on approvingly, and Humming Bob followed his example at the other end.

'I know the loss would be mine,' observed the captain philosophically, 'if I was to deprive myself of your hedifying society; but the prejudices of one's youth must be respected, and something is owing to the paternal hexample, as the young and intelligent native of the Cannibal Islands feelingly hobserved when he eat the powder-monkey of a British man-o'-war.'

"When the boys had purified themselves, Captain Slog entered the pot-room, while they were running up and down in the air to dry, and ordered the lunch he had spoken of. Great hunches of bread and cheese were set before each of them, and the first pewter-pot of beer quickly disappeared. When at last they could eat no more—and the time was a long while coming—the captain, putting his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and throwing himself back in his chair, exclaimed,

'Young gentleman, you will oblige me by showing me that bit of pasteboard which the swell gave you, and repeating the conversation which took place between you.'

'He gave me no card,' answered Patsey, think-

ing himself justified in denying the fact in the interest of his patron.

‘The devil is the father of lies, popularly supposed so to be,’ replied the Captain; ‘and his sable majesty—that’s a good line, as we should have said when I was a compositor in Melbourne, Australia—must have been at the root of your juvenile tongue when you gave utterance to the unblushing falsehood.’

‘What do you want to know for?’ asked Patsey, much confused, but growing braver under the influence of bread and cheese and beer.

‘Simply because I think I can promote your interests. I never do anything from a love of self. When I see a promising child like yourself get hold of a chance, which he is likely to neglect on account of having no one at his elbow, it grieves me to the heart. Let me know the ins and outs of the game, and I will tell you how to work it.’

‘Thus pressed, Patsey showed the Captain the card, and the latter noted the address well.

‘He told me to come up this evening,’ said Patsey; ‘and I meant to have polished myself up a bit with the five bob, only you took it from me.’

‘Better go as you are; the effect will be greater, and you’ll be more pampered and petted than if you was ’arf respectable and ’arft’other. I wouldn’t have you remove a spec of mud for the world. And now, what do you mean to do when you get to Porchester-terrace? Don’t be afraid of telling me. I should like to be a father to you, having no children of my own. If the gentleman offers to send you to a reformatory, I suppose you’ll go?’

‘If they’ll give me plenty of victuals, and teach me how to read and write, and learn me a trade as well,’ answered Patsey.

‘I thought so ; and if he doesn’t do that, but gives you half a sovereign for your honesty, you’ll take it?’

‘’Arf a sufferin ! Yes, and glad of the chance,’ replied the boy eagerly.

‘You want somebody behind you,’ said Captain Slog, sagaciously nodding his head, ‘that you just do. Now put yourself under my guidance. Go to the terrace, tell a artless tale, listen to all they say, and answer that you’ll consult your father.’

‘I ain’t got one ; I’m a orphan,’ put in Patsey.

‘Are you ? What did I say just now ?’ replied the Captain, with an injured air. ‘Didn’t I say I’d be your father ? I’ll adopt you.’

‘You ?’ said the boy, regarding him with a look of half aversion, half fear.

‘Why not ? I’ll only lather you once a-week, whether you deserve it or no ; and you shall have a better living, ever so much, than you get now, without doing half the work for it.’

‘The Captain’s right ‘nough, he is,’ exclaimed Humming Bob. ‘I wish he’d take a suddint fancy to me, I do. I’d be his kid, and no mistake.’

“ Patsey looked once more at Captain Slog, and though he was evidently pleased at having attracted his favourable notice, seemed doubtful of the motive which prompted him to be so kind.

“It was improbable that the man who had taken his five shillings from him in so heartless a manner could really care for him.

‘ Very well,’ said the Captain; ‘ that’s settled. Silence gives consent, they say, and you are to be my boy. You’ll never repent it, if you do what’s told you. Now listen to what I’ve got to tell you. When you’re asked to-night about your parents, you must say your mother’s dead, but your father is a lighter-man out of work. It’s always as well to be out of work, because people don’t want references to your employers. I can come up another time with you, if I’m wanted. If I’m not, I shall stop away. You must say also that I’m werry good to you when I’ve got any money, but times has been awful bad lately. You give me the five shillings to-day, because you thought I should lay it out for the best. There’s a good deal of truth in that, as you know,’ he added, with a grin.

‘ If you’ll treat me kindly, and give me plenty of grub,’ said Patsey, ‘ I don’t mind having you for a father.’

‘ That’s good of you,’ answered the Captain, with a bow. ‘ I’m proud of your condescension. As for grub, you shall have the best the exchequer will afford. Bakin for breakfast, saveloys and trotters for lunch, with a sixpenny plate of meat, prime cut off the jint, for dinner; and if that don’t suit your fastiddus happetite, I’ll take you into the City and give you a feed of champagne and turtle.’

“ So, after a long conversation, it was settled that Captain Slog should stand in the place of a father to Patsey, and that the latter should represent such to be the fact to Mr. Alfred Cotsworth that evening.

“ Humming Bob laughed at the idea, and rather

envied Patsey than otherwise. What the Captain's ideas were, the latter did not attempt to guess. He was content, being simple-minded, to think that the Captain had taken a liking to him on account of his forlorn condition, and was going to act as a parent to him simply and purely from benevolent motives.

"The other boy knew better than that; but he would have accepted the new relationship with all its responsibilities.

"Captain Slog took such an interest in his offspring, that he accompanied him in the evening to Rochester House. He scraped some of the mud off his clothes, stood him a pennyworth of blacking for his old, shabby, worn-out boots; 'Gentlefolks,' he said, 'being mighty particular about their Brussels and Turkey carpets.' He also had his hair brushed and oiled.

'Cleanliness is next to godliness, my toolip,' he remarked, as he put the finishing touches to Patsey's toilet. 'That used to be a favourite observation of my poor dear dead father; but it was a pity that he, being a coal-miner in the north, could seldom act up to his principles.'

'Shall I do now?' inquired the boy, putting on his cap.

'You're fit to go to a hexecution,' answered the Captain. 'Don't forget to call me father, and give me a hexcellent character. Just say it once or twice, to practise your unhaccustomed lips.'

'Father!' repeated Patsey.

'Very good! If you could throw a little more tenderness into it, all the better. Half a tone higher or lower—study the inflection of the voice: fa-ather.

So ; with a stress upon the *a*. A judicious whine is everything when you want to draw the halfpence.'

'Fa-ather,' said Patsey, imitating the drawl of the burglar.

'Capital ! I shall begin to think you are my che-ild, my long-lost son, as they say at the Vic. Already my heart warms towards you, and in a transport of uncontrollable affection I—'

"He stopped abruptly.

"They were still in the tap-room of the Black Cap. A little man with a fat red face had entered. He was the cause of the interruption ; for turning to him, Captain Slog exclaimed in affectionate accents, 'What, Willum !'

'Willum it is,' was the answer.

'Does not a meeting like this make amends for short commons and hard times ? What are you going to take, Willum ? I heard you'd been besting a bit down at Brighton, and had been temporally detained at Lewes.'

'Which the verdict was Not Guilty ; the prosecutrix being pious, and afraid to swear to me. However, the swag's right enough, and as I'm flush, I'll stand Sammy,' answered the new-comer.

'I'm not proud. You're kind, and I'm grateful ; and as it pleases you and don't hurt me, why, we'll have a drop of rum,' said the Captain.

"Willum ordered 'two drops' of rum, and looking at Patsey, said, 'Got a kid ?'

'Yes, and a proper kid too. He's going to be a mine of wealth to me, and make my fortune, ain't you, my smiling cherub ?'

“ Patsey grinned.

‘ Look at him,’ continued the Captain, chucking him under the chin. ‘ Bless his little heart, ain’t he like his father ? that’s me, you know.’

‘ You ! What’s the caper ?’ queried William in astonishment.

“ The Captain took him on one side, and they conversed in a low tone for some time. At the expiration of their confidential talk, Patsey heard William exclaim,

‘ That’ll do, that’s good enough ! and I am with you.’

‘ Jemmy and centre-bit ?’

‘ Yes, and all the tools of a fly cracksman.’

‘ Will it run to a growler—all the way to Porchester-terrace ? I’m not much up to walking, and the police in that division are set spiteful against me.’

“ William produced some money, and the three went into the street, the Captain leading Patsey by the hand.

“ A four-wheeled cab took them to the top of Porchester-terrace, and they walked down it, William on one side, the burglar and the child on the other. Suddenly a low whistle from William was heard.

‘ Willum’s twigged the mansion,’ exclaimed Captain Slog, crossing over.

“ The light from a lamp enabled him to read on a door-post the words ‘ Rochester House.’

‘ Now, my lad, here’s where you’ve got to go in,’ said the Captain in a hoarse whisper. ‘ We shall be waiting up the road for you. Don’t say as we’re

here; be careful, and mind your p's and q's. If you spoil us, I'll break every bone in your skin, and no flies! Do the thing what's right, and your life will be—be one pleasant dream,' he added, as he reflected for a moment, and the poetical side of his nature rose to the surface.

'I know, and I'll square it up beautiful,' replied Patsey.

"The next moment the bell was pulled gently, and both William and the Captain shrank out of sight up the road like two dark shadows.

"I now come," said the Major, "to an interesting part of my story. The boy was admitted to the dining-room. The ladies had retired, and the gentlemen were sitting over their wine. Among the guests were myself—"

"You!" ejaculated Horace.

"Myself," repeated the Major, "and my esteemed friend Brady."

"My father!"

"Precisely so. The boy was asked many questions, which he answered truthfully. He remembered living in the country; he had been brought up to London and lost by the nurse who had charge of him, the wretched woman preferring flirting with soldiers in the park to doing her duty. The boy had met with other boys, and rapidly became what he was when Mr. Cotsworth met him.

"Mr. Brady, amidst much agitation, whispered something to his host, and claimed the boy as his son. A mark on the right shoulder settled the question beyond dispute.

"I have a mark on my right shoulder!" exclaimed Horace.

The Major smiled.

"That ragged boy—" began Horace, when emotion stopped his utterance and he broke off abruptly.

"That boy," the Major went on, "was you, Horace!"

"Yes," said Horace, passing his hand over his fevered brow, "it all comes back to me now—all, all! I can see it as if in a dream; I see it through a mist, as my sluggish memory serves me."

"I have little to add," concluded the Major. "You told us about the intended burglary. The police were communicated with, and their services put in requisition. The burglars were captured, and you were sent to a private tutor's, from whence you were removed to Eton. Is it not a romance?"

"It is indeed," said Horace.

There was a pause, which was unbroken save by the bubbling of the water in the Turkish pipes.

This silence, which was becoming oppressive, was broken by a knock at the door.

Mezroul appeared and made a sign.

"Wait!" exclaimed Major Rastock.

Mezroul instantly disappeared, and the door closed behind him.

"Now that you are prosperous once more, you will, I suppose, renew your acquaintance with your old friends?" said the Major.

"I have none," answered Horace, with a sad shake of the head.

"How is that?"

"They were weighed in the balance and found wanting."

"Would not you have acted in the same way? Can a man in a good position afford to know one who is poor? Can you blame Patty, for instance? She was accustomed to a luxurious life; exile and poverty would have killed her. Do you hate her for being frank with you?"

"I do not hate her," said Horace.

"Then you love her?"

"That does not follow."

"What then?" asked the Major.

"I despise her," replied Horace with dignity.

The Major touched the bell, saying,

"Ah, my young friend, you do not know yourself. She is one of those women who may offend you. In her absence you condemn her; but if you look at her face, you forget all her faults."

Horace Brady was about to reply, when the door opened, and a handsomely-dressed woman entered.

Rising, Horace was much troubled; he shook like a sapling in a storm.

The woman advanced to him and kissed him without being repulsed, murmuring words of love the while.

Horace, totally overcome, sank back in the chair and became insensible.

"Leave him alone," said the Major coldly. "He will come to his senses presently. In the mean time do you sit by his side."

"Is it true that he has money?" asked the woman.

"As I told you in my telegram. He has about his person now nearly 13,000*l*. Put him under the old spell, which I am assured is not yet broken. Ruin him quickly; I desire it."

"If any one can do it, it is me," replied the woman, with a vicious smile.

"I believe it; and that is why I sent for you. Make short work of him. It is necessary for my ends."

"You will assist me?"

"To the best of my ability," answered the Major.

The woman uttered a hollow laugh, which sounded sepulchral and dismal.

She sat down by the side of Horace, and the Major resumed his pipe.

This woman was Patty Brooks, the young man's evil genius.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LOVE ONE BUYS.

THE swoon into which Horace Brady had fallen was not of long duration.

He opened his eyes, sighed deeply, and sat up.

His gaze fell upon Patty, and his features softened; his hand sought hers, and grasped it warmly. This was a proof that it was impossible for him to forget the past.

"Dear, dear Horace!" she murmured softly.

Suddenly he withdrew his hand with an abrupt jerk, and his features became hard and stern again.

His ostentation of affection was not the fruit of impulse.

"I am sadly forgetful," he said. "I was thinking of old times, and imagined that you were the Patty you once were."

"So I am, darling. I have always been the same to you," she answered.

"It is not true!" he cried almost fiercely; "you were a fine-weather friend; when the storm came, you left me to my fate."

"O, if you talk like that, I shall go," she said.

Rising, she walked slowly to the door.

He did not speak for a moment; but fearing

there was a chance of her really taking her departure, he exclaimed,

"I beg your pardon. I forgot I was talking to a lady."

"That is sufficient," she replied.

Patty resumed her seat.

Horace, who had watched her carefully, was forced to confess that he had never seen her look so lovely.

"First explain to me how it is that you are here?" he asked.

"I will tell you. When you entered the Albany I was driving by in my brougham. Stopping the coachman, I sent my servant to follow you. He saw you enter Major Rastock's chambers. I was obliged to go home, but lost no time in hastening back to see you."

This specious story, in which there was not one word of truth, easily deceived so unsuspicious a young man as Horace Brady.

"Why did you not write to me?" he asked.

"You disappeared so suddenly, or I should have sought an interview with you long, long ago," replied Patty, into whose eyes tears forced themselves.

"You deserted me when you thought I had no money—you and my false friend Paveley, whom I had treated like a brother."

"I was taken very ill that night. The shock upset me, dear; and when I was well again, they told me you had gone abroad."

"Is this true?"

"O yes; can you doubt me? O, Horace, it was not always thus!"

Patty wept.

A woman's tears always had a peculiar effect upon Horace. They softened him, and he now made overtures to Patty by pressing her hand and calling her pet names, which checked the violence of her grief.

"Do you love me, dearest?" he said.

"Dearest! Do you mean that, Horace?" she said between her sobs.

"Indeed I do."

"Does it come—from—your—heart?"

"The old feeling is coming back. You are very lovely, Patty, and I cannot help loving you, though—"

"What?" she asked, drying her eyes.

"A doubt will creep into my mind. Do you know I am rich again? I have more money now than I ever had before."

"What do I care for your money? It is not that I want. Certainly one must have a little to live upon; but that is nothing when you love a man as I love you," replied Patty.

Major Rastock had glided into another apartment when their conversation commenced, as he did not wish to be any impediment to the free utterance of their thoughts.

"It all seems like a dream," muttered Horace. "Money, love, friends have all come to me as if by enchantment, and in the early part of the evening I did not know where to beg my bread. I can scarcely realise it."

"And I," said Patty, who was an excellent actress, and would have adorned a stage, "I too can fancy myself dreaming. It is too much happiness, dear Horace, to be near you once more, to look into your dear eyes, and see my image reflected there, to know that your loved lips are eager to press themselves against mine."

"How I have mistaken you, Patty !" he replied.

"You have indeed, if you thought I was false to you for one moment."

"It cut me to the heart, and pained me more than the loss of money and position."

"Foolish boy !" she exclaimed, patting him playfully on the cheek.

"Sit on my knee, Patty. Let me nurse you as of old ; let me feel you in my arms once again."

She came to him with all the humility of a little child, and let him take her up and place her on his knees, leaning her head on his shoulder, while he clasped her in his manly arms, pressing her to his breast, and gazing on her lovely auburn hair.

"My own dearest one !" he murmured in her ear.

She looked up in his face with smiles.

Their lips met in a long lingering caress, such as is so sweet to those who truly love.

Patty acted her part to perfection.

When she felt assured that his love had returned, she began to ply him artfully with questions, until she led him to tell her all about the money he had so suddenly acquired.

"And is it possible," she exclaimed, "that you have all that money about you ?"

"Quite possible, pet," he replied, "as you shall see."

His terrible poverty had not taught him either prudence or its cousin wisdom.

He drew a bundle of notes from his pocket, and counted the flimsy things before her until the amount came to a thousand.

"Take them, Patty; you shall keep them for me," he exclaimed.

"No," replied she, pushing them away and pouting her lips; "you will say what you did before."

"When?"

"Just now."

"What did I say?"

"You accused me of being mercenary."

"Nonsense!" And he crammed the notes into the pocket of her dress.

"That is a proof of my confidence in you," he said, covering her lips with kisses, which she returned.

There was what Shakespeare in the *Winter's Tale* calls "kissing of the inner lip," so fond and loving were they. Patty had, with much less difficulty than she had anticipated, effected a fresh conquest, which was all the more agreeable to her, as she had not met with any one during his absence to treat her with the generosity she had received at the hands of Horace Brady.

Major Rastock had all this time been reclining in an armchair in the room adjoining, smoking, while his ear was, figuratively speaking, glued to a hole in the wall, by means of which he could overhear every word that went on between Patty and Horace.

After allowing a judicious time to elapse for the kissing, which novelists are fond of alluding to as "billing and cooing," he knocked at the door.

"The Major!" cried Patty; and giving Horace one more salute, which was anything but chaste, she sprang up and resumed her seat by his side.

Horace was beaming with smiles.

As the Major entered he exclaimed,

"You and Major Rastock are old friends."

"We have met," replied the Major.

"Casually," said Patty, "as people do meet when they knock about."

"You will admit that I am always good for something sparkling," observed the Major.

"O, yes; you will stand fiz to any extent."

"That shall be my epitaph," answered Major Rastock.

"Shall I put it into rhyme?" asked Horace.

"Certainly. I did not know you were poetical."

"I have been obliged to try my hand at everything. What do you think of this? '*Ci-gît* Ralph Rastock, major in—'"

"Never mind that. Let us have the jingle."

"He always was ready to pay for some wine,
And never objected to ask one to dine."

"Capital! You might have used the plural, though, as regards the dining."

"You have not heard the addendum."

"O, there is an addendum?"

"Decidedly. It is this:

"In candour I add, between me and you,
The Major had ever an object in view."

"That is too bad," said Patty, laughing and showing her pearly teeth. "The Major is the most disinterested of men."

"See how I am calumniated," remarked the object of this doggrel.

Mezrou, who had received his instructions previously, now brought in a most *recherché* little supper, to which all did justice. Patty's brougham was waiting in Savile-row, and at about two o'clock Horace rose to accompany her home.

She got a chance, as they were leaving, of saying to the Major,

"I have made a start."

"How have you got on?" asked Rastock.

"Admirably. He is more spooney than ever. I can twist him round my finger. He has parted with a thousand pounds already."

"Good-night, Patty. You are a clever woman!" exclaimed the Major patronisingly.

Horace and Patty walked away, she leaning amorously on his arm.

CHAPTER XII.

LORD GEORGE LUMLEY'S WOOING.

MABEL GRAY determined to meet Lord George Lumley. She did not know what urged her to do so. It was her fate, and she could not resist it.

Annie Leigh's sneers and unasked advice made her more resolved to do so, as she considered that young lady had no right to dictate to her.

Dressing herself neatly but well, she left the house at the appointed time, wishing that Horace Brady was with her, and wondering what had become of him. She could trust him and rely as implicitly on his advice as she could on that of a brother.

Lord George Lumley was leaning against a lamp-post, smoking a cigar. He was well-dressed, as indeed he always was, and there was a certain sort of charm in the easy freedom of his manner.

Mabel hesitated to approach him, and was on the point of turning back, when he espied her with his quick searching glance, and advancing rapidly, said,

"This is kind. I scarcely dared to hope."

"I am here. What have you to say to me, Lord Lumley?" replied Mabel timidly.

"A thousand things, which I cannot utter all in a moment. I have a cab waiting at the corner. Take a drive with me, and we can talk at our ease."

"I do not know whether I should do right."

"That is a poor compliment to me," he said, as if hurt.

"Why?"

"Because I should not let you do anything wrong."

"Is your cab near here?"

"Close by."

"And you will bring me safe home?"

"On my word of honour as a gentleman," said his lordship emphatically.

She gently placed her little gloved hand on his arm, and he led her away triumphantly.

Mabel had taken the first step in consenting to drive with him. The completion of her ruin was easy to a man like his lordship, who was the most accomplished *roué* in London.

The cab was a hansom, and Lord George assisted her into it, following directly, and giving the driver orders which were inaudible to Mabel.

It was the first time she had been in one of those ingenious two-wheeled cabs, and she was pleased with the quick motion, the free draught of air, and above all by the companionship of a handsome man who had the additional advantage of belonging to the peerage, though his was but a title of courtesy.

It is rather a dangerous thing for a woman to get into a hansom with a man, unless she wishes to receive his advances, because it is so easy for him to put his arm round her waist and draw her towards him with an amorous pressure.

Mabel soon found this out.

Lord George ventured to encircle her waist with his arm. She made a slight resistance, which he overcame by saying something about "rendering the motion of the cab more easy."

"This opportunity of speaking to you, dear Mabel—that is your name, I am told—has rendered me indescribably happy, for I can now tell you how dearly, deeply, and devotedly I love you."

"Love me, Lord George !" exclaimed Mabel, affecting astonishment.

"Passionately ! Is there anything extraordinary in that ?"

"You have only seen me twice."

"Have you never heard or read of love at first sight ?"

"Frequently, but—"

"You have never met with a practical exemplification of it before. Is that what you mean ?" asked Lord George.

"It seems so strange—"

"That you should be loved, or that I should love you ?"

"I believe I have some claim to beauty, though no man has told me so before," answered Mabel in a low tone.

"Some claim !" repeated Lord George enthusiastically ; "you are the most ravishingly lovely creature I have ever met in my life ; and that is no empty compliment from me, as those who know me will tell you."

"Are you such a lady-killer ?"

"I do not say that. I am merely an admirer of

feminine beauty whenever and wherever I meet it. You must not misunderstand me. I have hitherto loved woman in the abstract, as one may be said to love a splendid painting or an exquisitely-chiselled statue. It was for you, dear Mabel, to inspire me with real, living, actual love. My only fear has been that you might love another, and that I should be doomed to immediate disappointment and a miserable future."

Mabel was silent.

"Am I wrong in supposing your heart to be engaged?" he resumed.

"I have never known what it is to love," she murmured.

"Then there is hope for me. You have yet to enjoy the sweetness of love's young dream. May I be your inspiration?"

"We are so slightly acquainted. We do not know each other's character sufficiently; and I fear from what passed on board the steamboat when we first met, that you are a general admirer of my sex."

"Fond of all, and faithful to none?" he queried.

"Yes."

"O, no; that is where you are mistaken. I have never, in the whole course of my existence, done such a thing before. I was attracted towards you, and wished to make your acquaintance; but you mistook the motive which actuated me," replied Lord Lumley, with apparent candour.

"And that motive was—"

"Pure love."

"Would you make a girl of whom you know

positively nothing your lawful wife, without the sanction of your friends ?" demanded Mabel.

This question rather discomposed Lord George.

In the course of his libertine career it had been put to him before ; but it was always more or less perplexing, though, as it was inevitable, he was rather glad when it was put to him, and he had shelved it.

"The fact is," he replied, "I am unable to marry for a year or two, as I am expecting to come into some property, which I should lose if I were to contract a marriage until the expiration of a certain time."

"Why, then, do you dream of such a thing?" queried Mabel, in an altered tone.

"Simply because I'm a firm believer in long courtships. They enable one to study the character of one's intended ; and it is often folly to marry in haste."

"And repent at leisure ?"

"Precisely so."

The cab stopped at the door of the Café Riche. Lord George sprang out, and extended his hand for Mabel to alight ; but she held back.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"At a place where I intend to offer you some supper. You will like it very much, and we shall be all by ourselves."

• Still she hesitated.

"I would rather go back," she said.

"After supper. You surely are not in a hurry for an hour?" he urged.

She was not in a hurry for an hour, and consented to his wish. He paid the cabman, and led her into the café, walking upstairs, followed by a waiter, and preceded by Mabel, whom he asked to go on first.

She took a rapid glance at the room below, and saw several men and fashionably-dressed women drinking wine at a counter, or sitting down near some tables. They talked loudly, and regarded her with an insolent stare, which made her glad to escape from their gaze.

Lord George Lumley ordered supper, which was quickly brought; and he and Mabel were soon engaged in drinking champagne, and testing the merits of a lobster-salad. Champagne was a wine she was unaccustomed to, and it began to take effect on her.

When supper was over, she complained of a dizziness in her head.

"It must be the wine," she said; "I am not used to it."

"Good champagne will never hurt any one," replied his lordship.

"It was foolish of me to drink it."

"Lie down on the sofa for a few minutes. Trust me it will do you good. You will be all right in half an hour."

Mabel allowed him to lead her to the sofa, and she reclined upon it. The feeling of dizziness of which she had complained increased, and it was with difficulty she could see Lord George. At length her eyes closed. The room seemed to go round with her, and she lost consciousness.

Throwing his coat over her feet, and placing her head comfortably on the pillow, his lordship drank another glass of wine, and lighting a cigar, went downstairs.

"Where is your good lady, my lord?" asked the proprietor.

"She is *entre deux vins*, as I intended she should be, and I have left her upstairs asleep on the sofa," replied Lord George, with a significant smile.

The landlord laughed, and his lordship began to talk to a showy-looking woman, who had just entered.

"Where have you come from, George?" she exclaimed. "I did not expect to find a sprig of nobility here."

"The peerage must be represented even in the Haymarket," he answered.

"It is a pity it does not find a better representative, then."

"You are so utterly incapable of judging, dear child," he answered, "that your opinion is deserving of less weight than would be that of one better able to form an estimate of individual character."

"Your character is pretty well known," she said.

"I flatter myself that I am the best-abused man in London, and at the same time the most admired."

"By whom?"

"Women principally."

"I do not admire you."

"Thank you for the compliment," replied Lord George. "Your want of taste is to be deplored. Fortunately you are single in your opinion, and more

fortunate is it for yourself that your susceptible heart does not flutter when in my presence, as I am not ambitious of enchainning your virgin affections."

The woman looked slightly annoyed.

"I hate chaffing with you," she said, "because you always get personal."

"My dear Moggy—I don't know the last name you have condescended to honour by its adoption—you—"

"Certainly not yours."

"It is already appropriated."

"Since you were knocked out of the clubs, and posted at Tattersall's?"

"My dear Moggy, you are the most charming of your sex, but you will listen to *canards*," said Lord George, thinking it time to propitiate her.

"If I am personal, you provoked the attack, and now you had better stand something."

"A mild lemonade-and-sherry?"

"Not for me, thank you. I could get that out of a commoner," replied Moggy.

"The limited nature of my income reluctantly compels me to refuse your request."

"I think there is nothing so bad as a poor lord."

This was said with an air of inimitable contempt.

"I am quite of your opinion," he answered.

"Why did not you get some money with your wife? I am told you married a lady in her own right."

"That is better than marrying a lady in her own wrong, as would have been the case if I had mar-

ried you, Moggy. As for my wife, poor thing, she is dead."

"Yes; you spent her money and broke her heart."

"Can you believe such things of me?" asked Lord George, with a forced smile.

"Yes, and worse."

"O, Moggy! I have done with you. I must transfer my affections elsewhere. You are queen of my heart no longer."

"You have no heart," answered Moggy.

"Did you say a bottle of champagne, sir?" asked the waiter, with his hand on the cork.

"If he didn't, I did, and I can afford to pay for it," exclaimed Moggy.

The waiter opened the bottle and poured out the wine, which his lordship sipped.

Moggy seized the glass.

"Are you going to pay?" she said; "if not, you shall have no wine. I cannot afford the luxury of a fancy man—I have not come to that yet. I don't keep men."

"No, dear Moggy; men keep you, or at least you would like them to."

"You insulting beast!"

"Twelve-and-six, sir," said the waiter.

"Put it down in my bill," replied his lordship.

"What a low thing to do!" remarked Moggy.

"What is low?"

"To stick up wine in a night-house."

"Come upstairs with me, Moggy. I know you are a judge of women, and I want your opinion of a new *débutante*."

"Who is she?"

"That is neither here nor there. Come upstairs."

"Where is she, then?" said Moggy.

"Screwed on the sofa. It was her first champagne, poor little devil, and it has doubled her up completely. She went off all at once, and I am letting her sleep it off."

"What are you going to do with her?" inquired Moggy.

"First of all make her love me. I think she does that now."

"And then?"

"Well, the usual thing, I suppose: love her for a month or two, and then turn her up," answered his lordship carelessly.

"Don't ask me to help you in your villany. I will always do what I can to save a woman from being ruined. Look what the poor creatures have to go through afterwards."

"Are you a poor creature?"

"If you like."

"What do you go through?"

"I don't go through the court periodically, as you do," she answered.

Lord George Lumley bit his lips.

"Have I shut you up?" she asked.

"No; I have not yet subsided into my boots, although you are down upon me like a beaver now and then. Do people ever call you a shrew or a ter-magant? I should like to be your Petruchio."

"You would find me a difficult Katherine. But about your sleeping beauty?"

"Certainly. Let us return to our beauty. Instead of ruining her, I shall make her fortune. All the women I start get on well. Were you one of my nominations? I really forget. If you were, you are the only one who has not done me credit."

"Thank God, no," replied Moggy.

"I am glad you thank God for something; it is a redeeming point. We shall see you in a home for penitent Magdalenes some day, making shirts, drinking tea, and singing hymns. That will be about your form, Moggy, in a year or two."

Moggy's eyes flashed dangerously.

"Do you want this wine at your head?" she asked.

"Well, no; on consideration, decidedly no. I prefer taking it internally. I'd rather have it inside than out."

"Hold your tongue, then. I cannot stand too much."

"If my memory serves me, you have stood nothing yet."

"You provoking brute!" said Moggy, half crying.

"Don't excite yourself. It is bad for the complexion. Rachel says so, and she is an authority. I believe in Rachel. But what I was about to observe was this. Men about town ought to present me with a testimonial for supplying the raw material in such large quantities as I have done. There is always a style about my—"

"Victims."

"Ye-es," said Lord George slowly; "victims

will do. It is not exactly the word, but it will do ; it shall pass. Now come upstairs."

Moggy followed him into the room where Mabel was sleeping heavily, looking very pretty with her hair dishevelled, and one arm drooping by her side.

"What a study for the 'Helpless Beauty'! — a subject for a gifted artist, is it not?" observed Lord George.

Moggy looked critically at her.

"What do you think of her?" asked Lord George.

"She is pretty," replied Moggy.

"Is that all you can say for her?"

"She's nothing wonderful. Her face is too full ; and look at her nose."

"Perfect ! You women are always d— ungenerous to one another," said Lord George, with a tinge of annoyance in his tone.

"Not at all. I'll say she's a Venus, if you like. I'll swear she is the loveliest creature I ever saw, if it will please you."

"Look at those hands," continued Lord George, taking one of Mabel's and holding it up.

"Paws, I should call them."

"Taper fingers, pretty pink nails ; quite an aristocratic hand."

"Well, you can't say she has a good skin," said Moggy.

"That's her great point. Her complexion is charming ; her skin like alabaster. Look here."

Lord George gently unfastened Mabel's dress, and displayed to view her palpitating bosom, which

was full and voluptuous. Her breasts were like polished ivory, and exquisitely rounded. He passed his hand softly over them, and Mabel was unconscious of the amorous pressure.

"What do you say to that?" he asked.

"O, I don't know. Fasten her dress up. I don't care about giving an opinion when you get down as low as that," replied Moggy, in a tone of some disgust.

Lord George carefully buttoned-up Mabel's dress, and sitting down by the side of Moggy, who had already taken her seat, began to smoke.

"What time shall you get home to-night, Moggy?" he asked.

"How can that interest you?" she demanded.

"I want to know."

"About half-past one. I came out for a spree. De Crespigny—he's my man now—has gone into the country."

"Can you give this child a bed? Because I shall keep her here till it is too late for her to gain admittance into her own house, and tell her I can get her accommodation at my aunt's."

"Yes, I can take her in," replied Moggy.

"Are you still at the old place, Maida-hill way?"

"Yes, but—"

Lord George drew a ten-pound note from his pocket, and gave it to her.

"You shall have another in a day or two," he said.

This timely gift silenced all Moggy's scruples.

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER.

A MONTH has elapsed since the events related in the last chapter.

Mabel Gray is an inmate of a pleasant house in the new district which has lately sprung into existence between Maida-hill and Kilburn.

The orthodox bird-cages, with the twittering canaries, and the bullfinch that won't pipe, are in the windows; the curtains hang coquettishly; the flower-boxes on the sills are filled with stocks and geraniums; and the little bit of garden-ground in front is neatly kept, and contains a few carefully-trimmed shrubs.

This was Moggy's home. Mrs. De Crespigny she called herself, though she had been known as Holland, Purcell, Pickering, De Vere, Landsell, Mortimer, Vane, Santley, and half-a-dozen others, who had basked in the sunshine of her affection, like silly flies in the heat of the summer sun.

Mabel was known as Mrs. Lumley, though Moggy always playfully alluded to her as her ladyship. She had succumbed to the artifices of Lord George, and was now living under his protection.

All had fallen out as he predicted.

Mrs. Leigh, prejudiced against her by Annie, would not permit her to enter the house at one o'clock in the morning, which was the time at which she arrived in a cab, in a half-stupid condition, the effect of the champagne she had taken at the Café Riche.

Lord George offered her an asylum at his aunt's. She accepted the temporary accommodation; and she fell like Lucifer, bright star of the morning, never to rise again.

Lord George was devoted to her.

He always was to a new flame. No man ever lived who was kinder or more attentive to a woman for a month or two.

His fickle nature would not allow him to love for any length of time. He grew tired of Mabel's charms in the usual space, and she began to notice it.

She had lived at Moggy's house, as we have said, for some weeks, never going out, except with Lord George, who had given her a few excursions. They went to the Crystal Palace on Saturday, when every one was there, for his lordship prided himself on defying society. He took her to Windsor. They went over the Castle, and had a drive in the Park, dining afterwards at the White Hart. There were trips also to Richmond and Greenwich; so that all went merry as a marriage-bell; and Mabel dreamed a dream of joy, looking forward to the time when this agreeable man would make her his wife.

Whenever she spoke to him of matrimony, he skilfully avoided the question, stopping her pretty mouth with kisses. Being exquisitely sensitive, as

are all young people whose susceptibilities have not been blunted, she soon began to notice a diminution of affection, and she regretted having so easily yielded all that a woman holds most dear and sacred. Could it be that she had fallen a victim to his blandishments, merely to be made the plaything of an hour, and thrown on one side as useless when his novel passion had lost its fleeting force?

She was sitting disconsolate in the pretty and tastily-arranged drawing-room in Moggy's house one morning after breakfast.

In vain Moggy tried to rally her.

"You are a woman of the world, Moggy," exclaimed Mabel. "Tell me what you think."

"About what?" asked Mrs. de Crespigny.

"My chance of being married to Lord George."

"I wouldn't give you much for it, if you ask me."

"Really! Can he intend to betray me?" said Mabel, whose countenance fell.

"You should have got him to marry you before you consented to live with him. Men, as a rule, never marry a woman when they have conquered without going through the ceremonies. You have lost your chance, in my opinion, my dear; though you know I don't say so to hurt your feelings."

"O, no; I am sure of that. But what am I to do?" asked Mabel tearfully.

"Do? why, do what heaps of women have done before you."

"And that is?"

"Get as much money as you can out of Lord

George—it won't be much though, I am afraid, as he is as poor as a church mouse, and must have got a bill done to spend so much money as he has done over you—and look out for another chance. I think you have had a lucky escape."

"From what?"

"Marrying Lumley," replied Moggy.

"But I should have been his wife, and then no one could say a word against me. O, how basely he has betrayed and deceived me!"

"That's very possible. All men are alike; they are beasts and liars. You can't believe a word they say. I always make a point of treating them as badly as I can, so that they seldom get the laugh at me. If you were married to Lumley, he would separate from you in a couple of months. It's the nature of the brute."

"Do you think he means to leave me?"

"I am sure of it."

"O, no, no! I cannot, will not believe it," said Mabel, with sudden energy.

"You can please yourself about that," replied Moggy, with an air of indifference.

"Look at the confidence I placed in him. Believing in his protestations and solemn promises, I gave up everything for him."

"Well, you are not the only woman who has done so. Have not I gone through the same thing? Was not I told a heap of lies, just as you were? and wasn't I thrown on my own resources, and made to get my own living in the only way that was open to me, while the scoundrel who had ruined me got an

appointment abroad, to 'sever the connection,' as he kindly told me in a note? But I had the satisfaction of seeing his name in the 'deaths' twelve months afterwards. The climate killed him."

"But—but I love him so," said Mabel, crying and bending down her head.

"You'll soon get over that; I don't attach any importance to that," said Moggy sagely. "There are so many nice fellows about, that you will soon forget a pig-headed, one-idead, heavy-looking man like Lumley. I never could see what there was in him to love."

"You don't know, you cannot know, how happy I have been in the full assurance of his love, and it is such a shock to me now to think that he is growing tired of me. You should have heard his vows."

"I've heard the same sort of thing over and over again."

"He swore on his honour—"

"He hasn't got any; he must have sworn upon an abstraction."

"Never mind that. He swore to love me for ever and ever, and talked about our souls after death uniting in heavenly bliss. He would love me, he said, even if all his friends turned their backs upon him, and he had to work for our daily bread."

Moggy laughed.

"There is one comfort in store for you," she observed.

"What may that be?"

"You will, if you go in for a gay life, have an opportunity of making lots of young army fellows

and university men fall in love with you ; when you can ruin them and turn them on the world, broken in health from dissipation and drink, without a penny, cut by their friends, unfitted for work, to lead a miserable loafing life, shy themselves over Westminster-bridge, or buy a shilling razor to cut their useless throats. That's a revenge I have enjoyed more than once. There was De Burgoyne, in the —th Hussars. I soon used him up. Now he's a bookmaker in Paris, though he's connected with the best families in England. . . There was Simpkins the City man. I made him go the pace so, that he was obliged to help himself to "somebody else's money, and he's at Portland Island, with Roupell and that lot."

"How you talk, Moggy !" said Mabel, who had not before obtained a glimpse of this, the dark side of her friend's character.

"Do you blame me ?" she asked, almost fiercely.

"I don't know that I do ; still it seems unnatural."

"O, very well ; you will soon change your mind. Just remember this—the more you let men trample upon you, the more they will do it. The weakest always go to the wall in this world, my girl."

A cab stopped at the door.

Moggy ran to the window and peeped behind the curtains.

"Who is it ? Any one for me ?" asked Mabel.

"Yes ; it's Lumley."

"O, I am so glad !"

"Have it out with him. Ask him for some

money; and if he means to cut you, make him tell you so," exclaimed Moggy.

"I can't do that," answered Mabel timidly.

"Please yourself. A woman never yet got anything by holding her tongue. I shall leave you together. I hate rows, and I can't bear spooning; and as you will go in for one or the other, probably both, I shall take myself off. Get him on to some champagne, and I will make him give me a cheque for it, and for what he had the other night, before he goes."

Mabel nodded; and her friend left the room, which Lord George shortly afterwards entered.

CHAPTER XIV

ADrift.

THREE days had elapsed since Lord George Lumley had been to see Mabel. This was a long time, because at first he never let a day or a night pass without visiting her, and she remarked when he entered that his manner was cold and distant.

Throwing himself into a chair he continued to smoke, and without kissing her, said, "I didn't feel sure that I should find you at home."

"Where have I to go, George?" she replied.

"O, I don't know. There are lots of places in London; sights, and shops, and things."

"I should not think of going without you."

"That is foolish," he answered. "Do you suppose I can always lug a woman about with me everywhere?"

The tears forced themselves into Mabel's eyes.

"I didn't think you would speak to me like that," she murmured in a low tone.

"Why don't you speak out?" exclaimed Lord George. "It's so tiresome when a woman takes to mumbling."

"You used to say you liked my voice because it was low and sweet," she remarked.

"One can't go on paying compliments for ever."

"I don't want you to do so," she said.

"The fact is, Mabel," he continued, "you must do something."

"Do something?" she repeated blankly.

"Yes, we must come to some arrangement. I am getting stumped. I expected some coin this morning, but the fellow I went to let me down. I am always being disappointed; no man in London gets such facers as I do."

"Am I a burden to you?" she asked in a voice that shook in spite of her efforts to control it.

"I don't want to hurt you, but I must confess that you are," he replied, looking out of the window.

"Now is the time, George," Mabel exclaimed, "for you to keep the promises you have made to me."

"What promises?"

"To marry me. If you are poor, as you say you are, I will live in cheap lodgings, and work hard with my needle. It shall not cost you anything to keep me. I am clever with my needle, you know."

"I think we had better separate. I can make you an allowance, so long as you keep yourself straight—say two pounds a-week. How will that do?"

"Will you not marry me?" asked Mabel in a stony voice.

"You see, the difference in our positions renders it—"

"Will you not marry me?" she persisted.

"If you want a plain answer,—flatly, no!"

"Then you have perjured yourself; for you have told me falsehoods. If you are so base, you are not

worthy of my love. I have sacrificed all for you, and now—now—”

She could speak no more. The pent-up grief of her heart burst forth in an irresistible torrent of tears. Lord George made no effort to stop her grief. It was a theory of his, that a woman always calmed down after a good cry ; so he let her “have it out,” as he mentally remarked.

At length, finding that he took no notice of her, her pride came to her rescue. She was piqued, and looking up, said, her eyes still streaming, “I cannot bear this brutal treatment, and I am ashamed of the weakness I have shown. You have taken advantage of a young, innocent, and inexperienced girl, whom you now wish to abandon. Go, I shall not follow you. I shall make no effort to find you out or trouble you for money ; and, as you are well aware, I have no friends to demand reparation from you for the wrong you have done me. Fortunately for you, the imperfect laws of this country do not punish the seducer : all the weight of the consequences of my indiscretion and your crime will fall upon me. You are free ; go !”

She rose as she concluded this speech, and there was a majestic dignity in her manner which awed the miserable voluptuary before her.

He cowered beneath her calm denunciation, and felt himself the abject wretch he was.

“Go !” she repeated. “I will be brave, and pluck your image from my heart. Heaven knows what will become of me ! I am an outcast from society, alone, friendless, penniless ; a hateful object

to my own sex, and one for yours to despise. God will reward you in his own good time for your treatment of me. I never wish to see you again. But mind this, I have no sentimental feeling of love for you now. I am proud, and my love has turned to hatred. Wherever you go, remember, Lord George Lumley, you take my bitter curse with you, and may it speedily drag you down into a dishonoured grave!"

"Upon my word, Mabel," said his lordship, "I did not give you credit for indulging in this sort of stuff. What cheap journal have you been reading?"

"Mine is the language of a broken heart," she replied.

"I am much obliged to you for your kind wishes, I am sure," he continued, "and I am still more obliged for the generous view you take of the matter. I did not expect to get rid of you with so little difficulty. Here is some money I brought for you: better take it. Coin always comes in handy: buys bonnets, dresses, and those things, you know."

He placed a purse on the table before her.

"I would rather starve than take one penny from you," she answered with spirit. "Do you think I have no more independence than to receive charity at your hands after what you have said to me?"

"I believe I am a brute without knowing it; but it arises out of my internal organisation, over which I can possibly have no control. I am so beastly practical."

"Will you go, please? I want to be alone. You have said quite enough to me to make me wish to be rid of you for ever," exclaimed Mabel.

"If that is the case, I will go. It has always been my wish to please you, and I will show my esteem and regard for you now by taking my departure."

Lord George coolly put on his hat, lighted a fresh cigar, pocketed the purse he had laid on the table, and walked to the door.

Mabel did not think that he was in earnest when he said he meant to leave her; and when she saw him really going, all the love he had implanted in her breast broke out, and rushing towards him she threw her arms round his neck, sobbing out in heart-broken accents, "O, George, George! you are not going to leave me like that! You will kill me, you will; I know you will!"

Lord George looked embarrassed.

He had hoped to get away without a scene, but he now saw that one was inevitable; so, with a sigh of resignation he put an arm round Mabel's waist to support her drooping frame.

"We can be good friends, my pet," he said.

"Your pet! Do you mean that, George?" she replied.

"Of course; you are and always will be my pet. It is my unhappy poverty which compels me to leave you."

"I cost you very little, and will cost less, dear George."

"That is all very well; but I should not like a poor woman. I could not love a woman who worked and pricked her fingers with needles, or made her hands black with pots and pans. I must have a wo-

man well-dressed, always smiling, nothing to worry her, delicately perfumed, well up in the magazines and new novels. A dirty drudge, with a thin poverty-stricken face, would soon drive my love out of the window."

"O, George, George!" sobbed the unhappy girl.

Gently disengaging his arm, he led her, or rather carried her, to the sofa, where he laid her down. She buried her face in the pillows, and continued to cry violently.

"Don't leave me! O, pray, pray don't leave me!" she said.

"I will come again and see you, Mabel," he answered. "But I am in such a deplorable position as regards money matters, that I don't know what to do. I can scarcely keep myself, let alone a woman. If you can suggest any way out of the difficulty when I next come, I shall be glad to adopt your suggestions if they are feasible."

"I would make any sacrifice for you, George," she said.

"I cannot say as much as that. I have arrived at an age when one gets habituated to certain things, and I could not bear poverty and distress."

"Why, then, did you delude me? If you had not told me you intended to marry me, I should not have left the peaceful home in which you found me. What will my father think now? He will indeed be justified in judging me harshly."

"I will see what can be done, Mabel," answered Lord George in a soothing tone; "though I cannot hold out any very brilliant prospect."

"I want you — I want your love, not money, George," cried Mabel. "I did not know how much I cared for you until I thought you were really going."

"You have my love, pet," he rejoined. "The parting is as much a shock to me as to you."

"We will not part. I will follow you to the end of the world."

"How contradictory you are!" he said in a tone of annoyance. "But it is always the way with women. Just now you said you hated me, and cursed me in the most approved theatrical fashion. Now, you will never leave me, and follow me to the end of the world. By Jove! no wonder the French have a saying that the greatest misfortune that can happen to a man is for a woman to conceive a grand passion for him."

"Why blame me, dear George, when it was you who made me love you? O, you are cruel, cruel! I was happy enough until you met me."

"What do you want?" he said petulantly.

"Your love, George."

"You have it already."

"No, no! You make me fear that you will desert me. Let us leave London. Come and live with me in some remote place, where we can be all the world to one another."

"Where is the money to come from?" asked Lord George, with what he elegantly called his "beastly practicality." "Besides, I can't drag you about with me."

"There is little hope for me," sighed Mabel. "

see that you love me no longer. You did not kiss me when you entered the room; you usually do. I noticed the change in your manner directly. Kill me, George; but do not abandon me."

"I have no wish to do so. Circumstances compel me to reduce my expenditure. I shall have to go and live abroad until certain things are settled."

"That would be delightful! Take me with you, George. I shall not be a burden to you, or a companion of whom you need be ashamed. Take me with you!" cried Mabel with sudden animation. "I will not ask you to marry me; I will not worry you by mentioning the subject. You do not know how mad I am about continental life. I can play, sing, speak French and a little Italian. O, dear, dear George, take me with you, please; please do; we shall be so happy. It will not cost much more to keep me and yourself than it would for yourself alone."

"I'll see about it," returned Lord George Lumley evasively. "I should not like to make you a distinct promise and then break down. One thing is certain: London is getting too hot to hold me, and if I can't make terms with my creditors, I shall have to go abroad. When I have looked over my accounts, and seen what money I have, and what I can get from Jews and friends, I shall make a bolt."

"O, George, if you would only take me with you!" was all Mabel could say.

"I'll come to-morrow, pet, and tell you how I stand."

"To-morrow!"

"Yes, on the honour of a gentleman."

"Don't say that — anything but that. I have heard that before."

"Devil take it! what am I to say? I have honour, I suppose, and I am a gentleman."

Mabel shook her head dubiously.

"Ta-ta for the present."

"Are you going?"

"Yes; got an appointment," he answered; "must go."

"O you dear!" cried Mabel, embracing him again. "I am afraid to let you go."

"You can trust me, Mabel?"

"After what you have said?"

"I hope so. I hope I am not beyond redemption."

"Go down on your knees and bury your face in my lap, as you did when you told me you loved me, and I will believe you."

"Hang it all, I can't do that! I'm not in the humour to be bothered. Women never understand business. Have not I told you I'm dunned and hunted, and afraid of being tapped on the shoulder? I wish to God that Bankruptcy Bill would pass!"

"Why?" asked Mabel.

"It will abolish imprisonment for debt on final process, and there will be no Whitecross-street. I should like to take the infernal place and set fire to it," said Lord George savagely. He put on his hat again, and extending his hand, added, "Good-bye, Mabel."

"For ever?" she queried, looking searchingly at him, and trying to read his thoughts.

"Haven't I told you till to-morrow?"

"One kiss."

He bent down, removed his cigar from his mouth, and kissed her tenderly.

"Bless you, my angel!" murmured Mabel.

He walked away, leaving her extended upon the sofa. She did not follow him to the door; and he was congratulating himself upon making an easy escape, when he met Moggy face to face in the passage.

"You cat!" he exclaimed, "you've been listening."

"Yes," she answered, with the utmost composure.

"Well?" he ejaculated.

"You are not going to cut the girl like this. I'm not a fool, if she is," said Moggy with determination.

"I offered her money, and she wouldn't have it."

"I will. Give it me for her."

Lord George extracted the purse from his pocket, and gave it to Mrs. de Crespigny.

"How much is there here?" she asked.

"Count it."

"Don't you know?"

"Fifty pounds, I daresay, or thereabouts."

"I will count it," said Moggy; "it's no use believing any thing you say. Don't attempt to go; I'll stop that. You sha'n't leave here till I've done with you. Take care; you know me of old, Lumley."

He leant against the wall, and remained perfectly

passive while Mrs. de Crespigny counted the money in the purse. There was nearly fifty pounds.

"Do you think you are going to get rid of her at that price?" inquired Moggy.

"Quite enough. It's handsome," he answered.

"Is it? I don't think so. Men like you are always shabby, if they think no one will stick to them. Now listen to me. I have an idea that I can make something of that girl; but I must have money to dress her, and buy jewelry, and that sort of thing. If you don't send five hundred pounds here by six o'clock this evening, I'll write to the penny papers and expose you. The Liberal journals will only be too glad to get hold of a scandal affecting a peer's son."

"Where the devil am I to get it? Do you suppose that I carry the Mint about with me?" said Lord George, whose face revealed the surprise he felt.

"I don't care where you get it. Go and rob somebody. It would not be the first time. All I know is, I must have it. London will be too hot to hold you if you don't."

"It's too hot already," he rejoined.

"Will you do it? or would you prefer taking the consequences of a refusal?" persisted Moggy.

"My dear child," said his lordship banteringly, "there is a Jewish element in your composition which would have rendered you invaluable as the wife of a man embarked in the groove of commerce."

"The Jewish element, as you call it, will not be satisfied until your account is five hundred to the bad."

"Insatiable avarice!"

"Go along. Get the money; bring it here, or send it. If you don't, no power on earth can save you from being exposed."

"But seriously, Moggy—"

"I am serious."

"I haven't got the money. Won't half do for you?" asked Lord George, biting his lip.

"No, it won't. Run along. The sooner you go, the sooner you will be able to do as I tell you. You know I am not a hum; I mean what I say. Trot along; you won't change my mind, if you talk for an hour."

Lord George smiled.

Finding that his arguments were not likely to be of any avail, he opened the door, let himself out, and was soon rolling along in the cab which had been waiting for him. The threat with which she had menaced him was one he feared. Moggy might go to the clergyman of the parish and expose his treatment of Mabel; the parson might at her suggestion write to the *Times*; and a pretty little scandal would spring into existence all in a hurry.

By dint of great exertion he managed to raise a hundred pounds, and sent it to Moggy with a note by a commissionnaire.

In his note he said something about it being impossible to get blood out of a stone; a hundred pounds was all he could raise, and he did not know how the deuce he contrived to get that. He should be off to the Continent the next day, to avoid some pressing debts; and she might break the news to

Mabel. He thought the hundred a fair price to pay, when added to the fifty, for the little indiscretion of which he had been guilty.

Moggy did not expect to get so much, in spite of the positive way in which she attacked him, and pocketed the money with gladness of heart, intending to break the news to Mabel on the following day, and lay the money out to the best advantage for her.

Mabel was really very fond of Lord George Lumley. There is always a charm about a man accustomed to the society of women, as the less conscience he has, the more dangerous he often is.

She firmly believed she should die if he abandoned her; but this was a silly fancy, which in due time she overcame, being helped towards this consummation by the sound common sense and the sterling advice of Mrs. de Crespigny, who lost no time in placing her position before her, and making her realise it.

The following day, after breakfast, Moggy opened the ball by saying :

" You know, Mabel dear, I like you very much ; but I am sorry to say I can't have you here any longer."

Mabel looked astonished.

" Have I offended you in any way ?" she asked.

" Not at all."

" Why must I go, then ?"

" Because De Crespigny is coming back in a day or two, and he would not like me to have any one in the house. It looks like letting lodgings and getting money out of women, and of course that would not do

for him. He has heaps of money, and gives me plenty."

"Am I not your friend?" asked Mabel.

"Yes, you are; I am as friendly as I can be with any woman. But the fact is, I would not trust any good-looking girl in the house with De Crespigny; it might lead him into temptation."

"O!" ejaculated Mabel.

"Now you see how the cat jumps, of course you will see the necessity of looking out for a place of your own."

"But Lord Lumley?"

"O, he's in Paris by this time. Don't be shocked, don't cry, don't faint; I sha'n't bother about bringing you to," said Moggy coolly.

"How do you know?" gasped Mabel, who went as white as a sheet.

"Because I had a chat with him after he left you yesterday, and he told me that his affairs were in such a state that he could not stop here. Call him a perfidious wretch, abuse him, run him down; it will do you good."

Poor Mabel sank back in her chair, and was incapable of speech or motion for a time, though she did not faint.

"Is he really gone?" she muttered.

"I am sure of it."

"Where?"

"That is more than either you or I know," replied Moggy.

"Give me my bonnet and shawl; I will follow him. I told him so; and if I join him abroad, he

cannot be so hard-hearted as to drive me from him."

"That is a mad idea. Listen to me. The affair is not so bad as you imagine. I have got one hundred and fifty pounds out of him; and if you had had the management of the business, you would not have had a halfpenny. But Lord George Lumley knows me, and I know him."

"What is money to me, when I have lost my darling?" replied Mabel.

"A good loss too," rejoined Moggy. "Lumley is a man I would not look at. You will meet heaps of better men about town. It is quite refreshing to see how innocent you are; why, you are a child, a baby."

"I want him, I want him!" cried Mabel.

"Then you'll have to want, that is all I have to say."

"O, Moggy dear, come and comfort me," Mabel said, in her grief.

"Get up, and have a glass of wine or a drop of gin," answered Moggy contemptuously. "When you have been cut by men as often as I have, you won't think so much of it."

"Have you been ill-treated?"

"Have I? of course I have. But I have the consolation of knowing if any man cuts me, that I haven't treated him too well. I shouldn't break my heart about De Crespigny."

"I am sure," said Mabel, "you are goodness itself while he's away. I have seen nothing wrong."

"Haven't you? Perhaps you don't know everything," replied Moggy significantly.

"Do you mean you flirt with other men?"

"I have a couple of men in tow who would take De Crespigny's place to-morrow, and be glad of the chance," replied Moggy. "But let's talk about your business. You can't stop here; so I should advise you to go to an old friend of mine, Mother Panton, who is a good old sort, and not more avaricious than the run of her class. Show her your temper, and she'll do what you like; knock under, and you'll be her slave; that's the sort of woman."

"What will she do for me?" inquired Mabel innocently.

"Lodge you."

"What else?"

"Board you."

"Indeed!"

"Dress you, and introduce you, and if you've the pluck and the luck, you may kick up a dust, and get a position in the half-world, as our lively continental neighbours call it."

"Will you talk to me about this to-morrow, Moggy? I don't suppose you want me to go to-day, do you?"

"O, no. I'm not particular to a day or two."

"When does De Crespigny come up?"

"On Saturday."

"And to-day is Tuesday. Very well, I will go away from you on Thursday. Will that do?"

"Certainly," replied Moggy. "And now drink a glass or two of wine—it won't hurt you—then dress yourself, and we'll go out for a spree. I can't stop in the house with 150*l.* in my pocket. Some of it must be spent, although it is yours, and not mine."

"Do what you like with it. Spend it all, if you like ; but don't ask me to go with you," said Mabel, half crying.

"I sha'n't ask you ; I shall make you. When I insist upon a thing, it is generally done, and I know it will be in this instance."

Moggy went to the chiffonier and produced a bottle and some glasses. After a little persuasion, Mabel drank some brandy, and after that she was induced to drink another glass.

"It will drown your care, dear," said Moggy.

"Will it?" asked Mabel.

"Don't you feel better already?"

"I don't feel quite so miser-erable," replied Mabel with a sob.

"I thought not. Have some more."

Mabel did have some more ; and at one o'clock she was in the humour to go out.

"I am so excited," she said, "I can't stop in. It will do me good to go out, won't it? I want some fresh air, I think."

"I have ordered the brougham," replied Moggy. "Here's ten pounds; that is as much as you will want to spend. I'd give you more, only you would perhaps get tight and be robbed, or else lose it."

"To spend—ten pounds!" exclaimed Mabel in amazement.

"Is it not enough? You can have some more."

"Enough! Why, it's a quarter's rent for some people. You surely would not think of spending so much in one day?"

"Lightly come, lightly go," replied Moggy.

"I've spent more than that in one night in the old days."

"What old days?"

"Before the one-o'clock thing, which shuts up all the places, and extinguished Kate's, Mott's, and all the night-houses; an Act of Parliament I believe they call it. All the difference it makes, though, is that one has to begin a few hours earlier. Go and dress yourself; put on my black moire if you like, and some of my jewelry. I want you to look your best. Shall you be long?"

"Half an hour—not more."

"All right. Run upstairs, and I'll send Mary to do your hair. Wear one of my coils—you know, those auburn lengths; your hair and mine are the same colour; twist it round and round, and it will look ever so much better than a chignon."

Mabel left the room to go and dress; and Moggy, counting out some money, locked the remainder up in a dressing-case.

CHAPTER XV.

AT MRS. PANTON'S.

MRS. PANTON was an elderly lady, although she bore her years well. Her cast of countenance was decidedly Israelitish. She lived in Alpha-road, St. John's-wood, and her house was frequented by those gentlemen who had the honour of her acquaintance, and they were not a few. She gave very nice evening parties occasionally, and kept a good cellar, though those who partook of her wines had to pay considerably more for them than they cost their owner. Mrs. Panton had not the regular Jewish lisp, though she was very fond of saying "my dear schild." This mode of salutation was continually on her lips. Some people called her the Diamond Jewess, on account of the quantity of diamonds she always wore. On each finger she had three or four rings, which gave her a grotesque appearance.

Her house was sumptuously furnished.

Mrs. Panton was in the drawing-room as the girls called. With her were three of her young ladies, telling each other's fortune with cards. One tall handsome girl, named Loo Rivers, had just remarked that the cards were against her, and she should not go out at all that day. She knew in the

morning she should have no luck, as the turquoises in her ring were as pale as death.

"O, my dear schild!" exclaimed Mrs. Panton, rising from her chair as Moggy entered, followed by Mabel, "I am glad to see you. And who is it with you?"

"Something new. One of Lord George Lumley's nominations for the Meretricious Stakes," answered Moggy, laughing.

"Sit down, my tear girls," continued Mrs. Panton. "It is so kind of you to come and see your old aunty, and have a quiet chat for an hour or two."

"I want to talk to you, aunty," said Moggy.

"Certainly, my dear schild," replied Mrs. Panton. "Let your friend go to the window and talk to the young ladies."

Mabel went over to the window, and grew red in the face, as she was considerably stared at by the "young ladies," who did not make room for or ask her to sit down.

"Are you playing cards?" asked Mabel, not knowing what to say.

"No, we are telling fortunes," answered Loo Rivers.

"Will you tell mine?"

"We've got something else to do."

"O, don't flatter yourself that I am anxious to make your acquaintance," exclaimed Mabel, becoming brave.

"Just as much as we are to make yours," was the answer.

"I hate a parcel of women," continued Mabel.

"The men will talk to me, when they wouldn't look at you."

"Do you mean that for me?" asked Loo Rivers.

"If you like. I meant it, though, for the lot of you."

"You've got a pretty good cheek to come in here and bully us," said Loo Rivers, with a half-grave, half-comic expression of countenance. "Don't you think you have, now?"

"I haven't taken the trouble to form an opinion about it," answered Mabel carelessly.

"I thought your friend said you were something young and innocent. I always make a point of snubbing fresh faces."

"I should be sorry to have been knocking about so long as you have."

"Sit down," said Loo; "we must know one another. "I think you're one of my sort."

"Thank you, I can stand. If you had asked me to take a seat just now, I would have done so; now I shall refuse. Besides, I don't want to know you."

"Go to the devil, then!" cried Loo Rivers, who lost all patience; and Mabel walked to the window, and amused herself with a stereoscope.

In the mean time Mrs. Panton and Moggy had a confidential conversation.

"I want you to take Mabel in, and board and lodge her," said Moggy.

"Mabel! what else is her name?" asked Mrs. Panton.

"Gray."

"Any relation of Granville Gray? He is a great friend of mine and of Loo over there."

"Is it likely?"

"Not very. But she's a ladylike stylish piece of goods, and I'll have her, my tear schild."

"There's fifty pounds at home, which I will send you to buy things with and start her properly. She ought to go, if she is well taught. She can sing, play, and talk French and Italian as well as English; and that's more than half the women about can do."

"So it is, dear schild. You will send me the fifty?"

"If you'll undertake to give her the value. If you deceive me, I'll pull your house down. I take an interest in the girl, and won't have her sacrificed. Get some wine up, aunty, will you?"

Mrs. Panton rang the bell, and some champagne was brought up. The young ladies and Mabel partook of it, and the latter became better-tempered under its softening influence.

Taking Moggy aside, Mrs. Panton said in a whisper,

"It is nearly three, and at that hour I expect a gentleman here. I should like him to know your friend."

"Leave her here, then," answered Moggy; "and let him introduce himself."

"Will that be the best way?"

"I think so."

Mrs. Panton said something to the "young ladies," which had the effect of making them retire to

another part of the house. Soon afterwards Moggy went to Mabel, and said,

"Can you amuse yourself, my dear, with a book for half an hour?"

"Certainly," replied Mabel; "I am never alone when I have something to read."

"You will stay here?"

"If you like."

"I am going upstairs with Mrs. Panton; but I sha'n't be long."

"Very well."

Mrs. Panton and Moggy withdrew.

Mabel took up a volume of Tennyson's works, and was soon deep in that thrilling and mystic poem "Locksley Hall."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck three.

She thought she heard a carriage stop outside, but did not take any notice of it.

Presently the door opened, and a handsome elderly man entered. To her surprise, he lifted his hat, and walked politely towards her.

She thought she had seen that thin, pale, dissipated face somewhere before, but where she could not tell,—in her dreams perhaps.

He too looked earnestly at her, as if trying to recall her features; but after hesitating for a moment, he gave up the attempt in despair, and sat down near her.

"How do you do, my dear?" he exclaimed.

"I am very well. But I don't think I have the honour of your acquaintance," Mabel replied.

"Mrs. Panton should have introduced me," he

rejoined. "She will, I have no doubt, supply the omission presently, when she comes down. The servant tells me she is upstairs. In the mean time I hope my society will not be disagreeable to you."

"Not in the least," answered Mabel, laying down her book.

"May I ask you to have some wine? I believe that is the usual thing."

"Is it?"

"O, yes. Shall I ring?"

"If you please," replied Mabel; adding, "This is my first visit to this house, and I am ignorant of the habits and customs of the inmates."

"Do you intend to stay here?"

"I fancy so."

"Will you tell me your history? I think there is nothing so entertaining as casual scraps of biography," said the gentleman.

"I have not much to tell," replied Mabel. "Mine is the old, old story, which I should think became sickening by constant repetition. I mean misplaced confidence and its effects."

"In a man?"

"Of course. I loved the villain, and he lied to me. When he got tired of me, he threw me over; and I—I would rather not talk about it, as the shock is too recent."

"Your friends?"

"I cannot say that I have any. My father—"

"Surely he is your best friend?" exclaimed the gentleman, regarding her steadfastly.

"I cannot say so."

"It is very impertinent, my dear young lady, for a comparative stranger like me to ask you questions; but if you will gratify my curiosity, and make me your confidant, perhaps I can do something for you."

"I would rather talk about something else, if you will permit me."

"By all means," said the gentleman, with well-bred grace. Seeing a piano in the room, he added, "Do you play?"

"O, yes."

"May I beg the favour of a little music?"

"I shall be glad to oblige you."

He got up, placed the music-stool for her, opened the piano, and looking over a pile of music, exclaimed,

"I hope you have a soul above music-hall rubbish?"

"I know none of it. I have never been to a music-hall," replied Mabel; "though, if you like something light, I am well acquainted with Offenbach—*Blue Beard* and *Orpheus*; or would you prefer operatic selections?"

"Operatic, by all means."

"Bellini, Verdi, Meyerbeer, Rossini?"

"Rossini, by all means. The *Barbiere*, if you will. It is a favourite opera of mine."

Mabel lightly struck the keys, and with great taste, skill, and vivacity played selections from the *Barber of Seville*. The gentleman was surprised and delighted. When she had finished, he complimented her highly upon her performance. She took these

praises as a matter of course, for she knew she was a finished musician.

"Where did you learn?" he inquired.

"Abroad."

"Ah, they have a higher appreciation of music on the Continent than we have in this country. Still, if you had not naturally remarkable aptitude for learning the art, you would never have acquired the proficiency you have. May I ask what part of France or Germany you resided in?"

"A place well known to English people—Boulogne."

"Ah, I know it well. I had a child at school there," said the visitor, with a sigh.

"You—had—a—child—there?" repeated Mabel, agitated, she knew not why.

"Yes; but unfortunately a wide gulf separates us. My Mabel is lost to me for ever."

At these words Mabel was seized with a violent trembling.

The gentleman rose with much concern, thinking that she would fall from her chair. A sudden light seemed to break upon him.

"Where have I seen you before?" he exclaimed. "Speak, child! Your features are familiar to me. There is a resemblance to one long dead. My wife seems to live again in you."

With difficulty Mabel exclaimed,

"I am Mabel, and you—you are my father! Something told me so when you entered the room; but I am, as you too truly say, lost to you for ever."

It was indeed Granville Gray.

He sank back in a chair, as if he had been shot.

"Great God!" he said, "I am indeed being punished for my vicious life. It is awful to think that I should thus meet my own child."

He buried his face in his hands to conceal his violent emotion. The voluptuary, the spendthrift, the man about town, had met with many rebukes and punishments for his excesses; but his sin had never been so clearly brought home to him before.

Mabel grew gradually calm.

"I am glad that we have met," she exclaimed; "because I can now prove to you that when we formerly came in contact on that dreadful night, I was not unworthy of your love. If you had not acted so hastily, all would have been well. You should have paused to make inquiries. It was after that, when I fancied myself deserted by all, that I listened to the false vows of a base man, and fell."

"Tell me his name," said Granville Gray in a hoarse voice.

"Lord George Lumley."

"Lumley! Good God! my friend, the companion of my leisure hours, my intimate associate. O Heaven, this is too much!"

"He has deserted me; and I have come here to live, following up the only means of living which are presented to me," said Mabel.

"But, my child," said Granville Gray, taking her hand in his, and looking fixedly at her with his dry eyes, into which no softening tears would come, "this must not be. I will protect you. Something must be done for you. Your indiscretion is not so bad

as I deemed it. Be calm, and tell me your history since you left Boulogne."

Mabel did as he requested her.

When she came to an end, he said, "Fool that I was to act with such haste! But it is but part and parcel of my career, which has been one long scene of folly, vice, and waste."

"No, father," replied Mabel sadly; "our paths lie apart. I have brought shame on your name; it is best for us to separate. I do not want to reproach you; but I must say, that if you had not left me unprotected in London, this would not have happened. I should have been under your charge."

"I am to blame; and you do perfectly right to tell me of it," answered Granville Gray. "You do not know my troubles, though. Then the sheriff's officers were after me, and I could not show my head anywhere."

"Had you but written—"

"Yes, yes; I was negligent, and confess it with confusion and humility."

"When we did meet, you turned your back upon me, because you thought I was the associate of the most degraded of my sex. I can safely say, that I should not have become what I now am, if you had not turned your back on me that night, condemning me unheard, and making no inquiries."

"Do not overwhelm me, Mabel. Have some pity," exclaimed the unhappy man.

"I have no wish to do so. I would not have said what I have, had it not been necessary for me to defend myself."

"You must not stay here," Granville Gray exclaimed, after a pause.

"What else is there before me?"

"I hope a happy and virtuous life. I will try and get you into some respectable family."

"The past will pursue me."

"Not if you keep your own counsel."

Mabel shook her head sadly.

A maid-servant knocked at the door, and being told to enter, did so.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Gray, in the imperious tone he always adopted to inferiors, which was increased by the annoyance he felt at his conversation being interrupted.

"Two men outside are asking for you, sir," replied the domestic.

"Two men? The devil!" he ejaculated. "What are they like?"

"Rough-looking fellows, sir."

"Have you opened the door to them?" he asked nervously.

"Yes, sir; they're in the hall."

"Tell them you were mistaken. I have been here, and gone away again. Will you do that?"

The servant was about to leave the room to execute this order, when the door, which had been left ajar, was pushed widely open, and two men entered without ceremony.

"It's no good, Mr. Gray," said one, who took upon himself the office of speaker; "we've planted you at last."

"Who are you, my good fellow? and how dare

you force your way into this house?" demanded Granville Gray furiously.

"I am Willis the bailiff, as you know very well, Mr. Gray, and I've got a little document here which empowers me to seize your body. It's a ca-sa. Ever heard of a ca-sa before, sir?"

"You d—d scoundrel!" cried Mr. Gray, foaming at the mouth with a rage he could not control.

"Don't swear, sir; it isn't good for the 'elth," said Willis, who was as cool as a cucumber. "We'd have brought a fi-fa, only you'd no goods to go against, living at hotels and all that. If you want to speak to the lady, sir, we're not in a hurry, and can sit down over a glass of wine near the door."

Mabel's agitation, which had partially worn off, increased at this untoward episode. She knew enough of the world and its ways to tell her that her father was arrested for debt.

Speaking to Willis, Mr. Gray exclaimed, "Show me your warrant."

Feeling in his coat-pocket, the sheriff's officer produced his warrant, and allowed his prisoner to look at it.

"O, it's right enough, Mr. Gray," said he; "we always do square it up right when we come after you. We know you; and you're a dangerous customer to deal with—one of the old birds, as one may say."

"Do you want a five-pound note?" asked Mr. Gray.

"I do want just such a thing. A fiver would make me happy; but it isn't good enough to-day."

"Why not?"

"The governor's son's outside in a hansom. We've had so many sovereigns not to see you, that he won't trust us now; and you're bound to go this journey, sir."

"Who gave you the information?"

"A woman, sir—a little woman all in black. She came down to the office in a cab, and said as you was gone up to Mother Pantton's, in St. John's Wood."

"Curse her!" muttered Granville Gray between his teeth. "Couldn't she be satisfied with what she has already done? Curse her a thousand times over!" Turning to Mabel, he added aloud, "The sooner I put an end to this unpleasant scene the better, my dear child. I am arrested for debt, as you may have divined, and I can't get out of it."

"That's right enough, that is," put in Willis, with a provoking grin.

"Hold your tongue, or I'll pitch you out of that window!" shouted Gray.

"Touching the wine, sir."

"There is some on that table. Help yourselves, and drink like swine, as you are."

"That's civil, anyhow," muttered Willis; "but one must make allowances for him. It's enough to crab any one's temper to be took when one is making it right with one's doxy."

So he and his fellow helped themselves to some wine, while the father and daughter conversed.

"I am so distracted," Granville Gray went on, "that I don't know what to do for you, Mabel. I shall have to go to prison, and I see no prospect of

getting out, unless I go through the court; and it will take me some time to prepare my schedule, and instruct counsel to overcome the opposition I am sure to meet with. Heaven and earth seem against me when I would do well."

An expression of agony crossed his handsome features.

"I will stay here," said Mabel. "It is too late to think of altering it now. I have gone too far, and you are powerless."

"I am indeed," he replied. "But to know that you are here! It is awful!"

"Too late, too late!" was all that Mabel said.

"Now, sir, if it's all the same to you, time's up," exclaimed Willis, who, with his companion's help, had finished the wine.

"Good-bye, my darling," said Granville Gray, kissing her with more affection than he had yet exhibited. "I will think when I am alone what is best to be done. You shall hear from me."

Mabel returned the cordial pressure of his hand.

He then beckoned to Willis, and left the room, preceded by one officer, and followed by another. On the threshold he turned to take a long lingering look at his daughter. She had allowed her head to sink on her hands, and was grieving silently.

"God be merciful to me!" muttered Granville Gray.

When he was outside the house, Willis said, "Where to, sir? The old shop?"

"No. I'll go to Whitecross-street—straight to Hick's. No more of your confounded sponging-

houses for me. If my creditors want to send me through the court, and lose every halfpenny, let them do it. Devil seize them ! I won't be played with any longer. There shall be a clean sweep this time."

"As you like, sir. You'll have a cab, I suppose?"

"No; I'll be hanged if I will. I'll ride outside an omnibus."

Willis smiled, but made no objection, contenting himself with saying,

"If it's a case of stump, Mr. Gray, I'll stand the cab, for the sake of old times. I've had you many times, and I don't like to do the thing shabby."

"So you shall, Willis," exclaimed Mr. Gray, whose mood changed all at once, "so you shall; and here's a public-house. I'll have a drink with you."

"As many as you like, sir," answered Willis, who knew his man.

It was so late before they left the public-house, that Mr. Gray was obliged to go to Bream's-buildings, Whitecross-street not being available till the morning, when Willis accompanied him there, and received a couple of pounds for his trouble and generosity.

CHAPTER XVI

GOODY LEVY'S TERMS.

It was midsummer; the earth pulseless and quiet beneath the preternaturally dark sky, which indeed grew heavier and blacker every moment.

Mabel had resided more than a month with Mrs. Panton, and was sitting at an open window, looking out upon the garden at the back of her house.

An invincible sadness had seized upon her.

The air, that had blown with scorching breath all day, had sunk with the coming twilight, and now no whisper of wind sighed among the tree-tops in the garden, or found its way into the flower-beds below.

Mr. Granville Gray had been violently opposed by vindictive creditors, and was unable to obtain his release; the commissioner before whom he appeared having adjourned his case *sine die*, without protection, because he refused to file an amended cash account.

By degrees Mabel became reconciled to her new mode of life, and listened to Mrs. Panton's schemes for making her what she called a swell.

"It's no use your becoming gay, if you're to do the thing by halves," she said: "what you want, me dear schild, is to do the thing heavy. There's lots of

money to be got, if you only get hold of the right men. And how are you to get hold of the right men? Not by stopping indoors; not by going about badly dressed. O dear no, nothing of the sort; quite different. You must look as if you don't want money; have heaps of diamonds, be dressed a swell, give yourself airs, and then the men will run after you. Look at Skittles."

"Who was she?" asked Mabel in the innocence of her heart.

"She was a proper swell, though she could go on when she liked. How she did let out at me once, to be sure! Dear, dear! it's years ago, but I shall never forget it as long as I live. You can be a Skittles if you like; but you mustn't be too particular. A thorough lady can never get on well as a fast woman; she must have some go in her, and be able to Billingsgate when it's necessary."

"Who's to find the money and the diamonds?" queried Mabel.

"Have you made up your mind?"

"To what?"

"To go in a buster, as they say. That's vulgar, that is; you mustn't talk about going in busters; but it's my way to use low slang sometimes—I've been amongst it all my life. You must go the 'ole 'og or none."

"I don't mind trying."

"I don't suppose you do," said Mrs. Panton. "You may make a fortune, and have your photos—your *cartes*, I mean—in all the shop-windows, and people will say: Who's that?"

"Will the answer be satisfactory?" said Mabel, with a smile.

"Certainly it will, if you're worked proper."

"Perhaps you will kindly enlighten me."

"O yes; I've come in here this evening on purpose for to do it. How dark it is! Shall I light up the gas and shut the windows?"

"No, thank you; I prefer the twilight; and the air is so oppressive, that I long for the bursting of the storm that I can see is coming."

"Ain't you afraid of the thunder?"

"Not in the least, nor of the lightning."

"O Lord!" said Mrs. Panton, "I'm that afraid of thunder and lightning, I get under the bed with a drop of gin, and mug and mug till I'm half silly, and go off to sleep. Thunder's awful!"

A few heavy drops of rain plashed on the hard dry ground, seeming to smoke as they touched the burning soil.

"You have not told me how the diamonds, and dresses, and the means of going about may be procured," said Mabel.

"From a friend of mine."

"Who is he?"

"Goody Levy. Every one knows Goody. He's very rich, and terrible grasping; but he'll part, if he thinks it likely he can get anything by it."

"How could he through me?"

"In this way. There are lots of money-lenders in London, who employ touts to get hold of army-men, young swells about town, and others; what better tout could a man have than a pretty woman?"

"I don't quite understand you," said Mabel.

"Don't you? then I'll try to explain. Suppose you were started—"

"How would you start me? Excuse the interruption."

"Goody Levy would get you into the ballet at one of the theatres; and if you had any wish for it, he'd get you a walking-lady's part in a farce, or to sing a song or two and show your legs in a burlesque. That's all that's needed nowadays to be an actress."

"Is it?" said Mabel reflectively.

"Of course it is; nothing but legs go down, and stupid songs with a jingle about them."

"Well?"

"Well, he'd have five thousand *cartes-de-visite* done, and send men round to all the shops with them, to have them on sale or return, and say they were Mabel Gray, the new actress. Do you see?"

"Yes," replied Mabel with a smile.

"All right; when you've had a few months at that, and kept the men off, you must be seen in the Park on a good horse, and at the Opera."

"After that?"

"You must look in at the Argyll or the Holborn regularly every night, if only for an hour, because when you get talked about, men will say, 'Where can we see her?' and the answer will be, 'O, at the Argyll,' or 'the Holborn,' whichever you like best. So all London, or rather all fast London, will go and see you."

"Yes?"

"Then, when you've got your name up, you must

cut those places, and stick-up to some good man with lots of tin. He will get you into a good set, and you've got the game in your own hands; d'ye see?"

"Perfectly."

"As regards Goody Levy," continued Mrs. Panton, "all he will want you to do is, to spend so much of the man's ready-money as to oblige him to do bills. You must recommend Goody, who will find the money, charge a hundred per cent, and double his capital in no time."

"O, that is it!" said Mabel.

"What do you think of it?"

"It seems feasible enough."

"Not a bit more than it is."

"When can I see Mr. Levy?" asked Mabel.

"He will be here to-night. I expected him before this. O my, what a clap! there's that awful thunder!"

As she spoke, a terrible clap resounded through the room, being immediately preceded by a blinding flash of lightning; the furniture shook, and Mrs. Panton clung to Mabel for protection.

The storm now burst in all its fury; the thunder crashed and the lightning flashed amid torrents of rain. Every time there was a fresh clap Mrs. Panton uttered an exclamation of terror, and clung still closer to Mabel for protection.

In half an hour the storm was over.

Mrs. Panton, with a sigh of relief, exclaimed:

"Thank God, it's over! I can't a-bear thunder. Let's have a bottle of fiz, my dear, to keep our spirits up."

Mabel made no objection, and some wine was opened. Mabel very nearly made a blunder in getting the wine out of the cupboard, however; for she took up a bottle of Ay mousseaux; whereupon Mrs. Panton exclaimed:

"Not that, my dear, that's Ay; get some Roederer. I only give the mousseaux stuff to fellows I don't care about. It isn't good enough for me, a long way."

Lighting the gas, Mrs. Panton solaced herself with a glass or two of wine and a cigarette, observing that the thunder reminded her of the Last Day.

This highly-original and matter-of-fact observation had hardly escaped her lips, when Mr. Goody Levy was announced.

He was a little man, decidedly a Jew, had black wiry hair and an oleaginous complexion, sharp eyes looking here, there, and everywhere, dressed in black, diamonded, spoke quickly, and evidently was a business man.

Shaking hands with Mrs. Panton, he said:

"Is this the young lady of whom you wrote to me?"

"It is," replied Mrs. Panton.

"O!"

He took a long look at Mabel, which made her cast down her eyes.

"That's bad," he cried.

"What's bad?" asked Mrs. Panton.

"Can't stand being looked at."

"I shouldn't mind being looked at by a gentle-

man; but I can't stand being stared at by a low brute like you!" exclaimed Mabel.

"That's better. I like that," said Mr. Goody Levy, rubbing his hands.

"She'll do; I told you so," observed Mrs. Panton *sotto voce*.

"So you want to be an actress, Miss—Miss—"

"Gray; Mabel Gray," supplied Mrs. Panton.

"Good name. So you want to be an actress, Miss Gray?"

"If it is part of your programme. I don't want to be a milliner, or a governess, or a companion to an old gentleman at thirty or forty pounds a-year; and if you can't suggest anything better, I shall be glad to accept your terms."

"We'll come to the terms presently. Let me see your leg," said Mr. Levy.

"Really," replied Mabel, "I don't see what that has to do with my capabilities as an actress."

"Everything, everything. I've been a stage-manager. Let me see your leg."

"I can't indeed. It—it is not decent," stammered Mabel.

"Decent? nonsense! It's a matter of business, my good young woman," cried Goody Levy impatiently.

"Do, there's a dear schild," said Mrs. Panton; "show him your leg."

Mr. Goody Levy produced a garter from his pocket, and holding it up, said:

"That's my measure; I must try it on. If you refuse, I can't do anything with you. You hear my terms."

With considerable reluctance Mabel consented.

She drew up her dress and petticoats, and, in Mr. Levy's parlance, "showed him her leg." He, with no scruple, no delicacy, went down on one knee before her, and measured the calf of her leg, and then fastened on the garter considerably above the knee.

"That'll do," he exclaimed, rising. "Look well in tights. That'll do. I'll put you on the stage, young lady."

Mabel unclasped the garter and handed it back to him, pulling down her dress, and said dryly :

"Thank you."

"You must come and see me," exclaimed Goody Levy, "and we will arrange the details."

"The details" was a favourite phrase of Mr. Levy's, and it had great significance. It meant that he was open to business, and Mrs. Panton was much elated when she heard it.

Mr. Levy stayed half an hour longer, and then took his departure. After he had gone, Mrs. Panton congratulated Mabel upon her success.

"He will do everything for you," she said. "He's got a mint of money, and he'll find you in dresses and jewelry and all that ; but—"

She hesitated.

"But what?" asked Mabel.

"You'll have to have somebody with you."

"Why?"

"To look after the things, and mind you don't bolt."

Mabel smiled.

"Who will be my keeper?" she asked.

“ Our Loo.”

“ Mrs. Rivers, as she is called ?”

“ Yes ; do you mind ?”

“ Not at all ; I should like a companion. But I suppose that will not be necessary at the beginning of my career—at the theatre, I mean ?”

“ It’s just as well ; and if he says so, I should not object, if I were you,” replied Mrs. Panton.

“ I will consent to all the arrangements he chooses to make,” answered Mabel.

“ It’s all for your good, you know,” Mrs. Panton observed.

So it was settled that Mr. Goody Levy should bring out Mabel ; and for the present it was arranged that she should remain with Mrs. Panton, on the principle of not throwing a chance away, the worthy woman remarking that “ little fishes eat sweet,” whatever she might mean by that slightly ambiguous remark.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW FRIEND AND AN OLD ONE.

THE undertaking which Mr. Goody Levy gave to Mrs. Panton as to the bringing-out of Mabel Gray he strictly carried out.

Having some interest with the manager of the new Frivolity Theatre, Goody Levy obtained Mabel an engagement ; but instead of receiving a salary in return for her services, she had to pay for the privilege of appearing.

She came on the stage twice in the evening—once as a walking lady in a farce, and secondly in the grand burlesque of *Charlemagne*—or *Charleymagn* as they called at it the theatre.

The Frivolity was very strong in “legs,” and the grand burlesque began to be talked about.

Young and old men thronged the stalls and private boxes night after night.

This went on for six months ; and though Mabel had many admirers, she, by the advice of Goody Levy, encouraged no one in particular.

One man was especially fond of her.

That was Mr. Sellford, the nephew of the Duke of Bevington. He was in the Foreign Office, and though not rich, had good prospects. He would come

into a large entailed property on the death of his father, and had expectations from his uncle.

"He will do as a walking-stick," observed Mr. Levy. His bills were very good, and all the money-lenders in London would have been glad to get hold of his paper.

Several hundred *cartes-de-visite* of Mabel were executed by a good photographer in Regent-street, and men were engaged specially to go to all the shops in the best part of the town where such things were sold, to dispose of them on sale or return.

Consequently the question arose, "Who is Mabel Gray?" Men answered this as they best pleased. Some said she was this, some that, and some the other. It was said that she was an actress, living under the protection of a duke; also that she was the daughter of a clergyman; others said she was the daughter of a commercial traveller, and had been a shop-girl at Peter Robinson's; others assigned Newington-causeway as the locality in which she had dispensed ribbons and tapes.

It was sufficient for Mr. Levy that she was talked about and that her portraits sold. He took care that she should be seen in various places, such as the Row, the Opera, and the best of the fast resorts, such as the Alhambra and the Argyll.

Every one raved about the magnificent way in which she was dressed, and the small fortune in diamonds she carried about with her.

She never went anywhere alone.

Loo Rivers was her inseparable companion.

One night they went together to the Alhambra,

where it was so hot and crowded that they were glad to go away.

"Where can we go to for half an hour?" said Mabel.

"Come to Barns's in the Haymarket; we can be quiet there, and no one will know you," answered Loo Rivers.

"Very well," said Mabel; and they got into the brougham.

They were driven to Barns's tavern, made famous by the eccentricities of the unfortunate Mr. Wyndham.

The proprietor, with his habitual smile, received them with marked *empressement*, and they were conducted behind the bar into the sanctum sanctorum, which is a privilege acceded only to the elect and those who are good for fiz. The proprietor rejoiced exceedingly in a blue coat with brass buttons, and an extraordinary combination of diamonds of the first water attached to his shirt-front.

"We expect you know who to-night," he whispered. "Some one came from M—b—h House with the straight tip."

"Who do you mean?" inquired Mabel.

"H. R. H. Wales, you know. He often goes about incog. I never say a word. Give him a wink, just to let him know I've penetrated his disguise, that's all. He hates being mobbed."

Whether there was anything in this assertion we are not prepared to say.

Nevertheless, during the course of the evening, a gentleman did enter the room, accompanied by one

about his own age, the first bearing a remarkable resemblance to the portraits of a certain exalted personage which are to be seen in every shop-window.

The likeness may have been accidental.

It probably was.

At all events, the spirited proprietor of the Wyndham Arms made capital out of the occurrence.

Mabel had not been sitting in state behind the bar long before two people entered, one of whom she immediately recognised. Her eyes sparkled with pleasure, and she extended her elegantly-gloved hand with cordiality, and exclaimed, "How do you do? I am delighted to see you!"

It was Horace Brady.

With him was Patty Brooks.

"You, Mabel!" he exclaimed; "and here! Is it possible that the Mabel Gray who has taken the town by storm is my protégée of the Blackfriars-road?"

"Yes; times change, and we change with them," said Mabel with a sigh.

"You sigh," he observed.

Mabel was about to make some reply, when Patty, who was of a jealous disposition, said, "Come here. While you are with me, you shall not spoon other women."

"It is an old friend."

"Old or new, I don't care. Come here!"

"You see I am under petticoat government," he said with a half smile as he walked away.

Mabel looked at him contemptuously.

Loo Rivers turned to Mabel, and said, "I'll make

it all right. It's Patty Brooks—I know her well; she's a jolly woman, only she's got an idea that every one wants to take her men away. I'll go and speak to her."

Presently Loo Rivers came back with Patty, whom she introduced to Mabel ; and Patty said,

"I have come over to you, because I think I owe you an apology. The fact is, I don't like strange women, and seldom make new acquaintances. Had I in the first instance seen my old friend Loo, I should not have said a word. I hope, now we are acquainted, to know you better, and shall be glad to see you at my house whenever you can spare time to come up."

They exchanged cards.

Mabel was still at Mrs. Panton's.

Goody Levy did not think it advisable on his part to take and furnish a house for her. He left that to the duke's nephew ; and Mabel, who was playing her cards well and leisurely, was in no hurry.

"Now tell me," said Patty, "how you knew Brady."

"It is so long a story," answered Mabel, "that I must beg you to excuse me. He will tell you, if you ask him, when you have an hour to spare."

"You were not man and wife?"

"O dear no ! brother and sister. That was in my good days."

"What do you call these—bad?"

"Not at all. Better—or the superlative, if you prefer that to the comparative, though I don't think I have culminated yet," said Mabel with a smile.

"May I admire your diamonds?" exclaimed Patty.
"What a splendid bracelet! How curiously made it is! Is it not old?"

"Very; and that adds to its value."

"May I ask where you bought it?"

"At the only shop in London where you can get such things—Pyke's, in Bond-street. Let me explain to you that these antiques are invaluable on account of their rarity. The jewellers cannot make them now; and you may meet a thousand women with valuable jewelry, but with nothing so rare and striking as this."

"I was just about to make the same remark," replied Patty.

"May I ask you a favour?"

"Certainly."

"Give Mr. Brady permission to come between us. I want so to speak to him, and you shall hear every word we say, I promise you."

"Horace!" exclaimed Patty.

He was by her side in a moment.

"Sit down here, and be a good boy."

He took a place between Mabel and Patty, Loo Rivers doing a flirtation with a little man in evening dress who had just come, and was making up to her in the full hope and expectation of being able to speak to Mabel and say he knew her.

Champagne flowed briskly.

The proprietor's face beamed. It promised to be a great night.

"Some people, as Malvolio says, are born to greatness," observed Horace.

"Is that my case?" asked Mabel.

"Unless you have it thrust upon you."

"Explain to me," said Mabel, "how it is that you are so well off again. You are as much a mystery to me as I am to you."

"Chance gave me a few thousands, which I am doing my best to get rid of."

"Thanks to me," put in Patty.

"You have a facility for spending money, my dear child, unequalled by any other woman in London or Paris," said Horace; adding to Mabel, "Patty keeps the accounts; I never draw a cheque.—Patty!"

"Yes."

"What is the balance at the bank?"

"O, about four thousand," she answered carelessly.

"How long will that last?"

"About as many months."

"I told you so. We are living at the rate of twelve thousand a-year—existing not upon interest, but on principal."

"When that is gone, what will you do?" inquired Mabel.

"That I have not taken the trouble to think about."

"I shall cut him, as I did before, and he will have to do what he can," said Patty.

"That is frank. At all events, you know what you have to expect," exclaimed Mabel, laughing. "You cannot accuse your friend of concealing her real sentiments from you."

"O, we perfectly understand one another," said Patty.

This careless demeanour on the part of Horace was merely assumed.

His brain was perplexed day and night with the thought of what would become of him when all his money was gone.

Yet he had not sufficient moral courage to break off the fatal connection which was ruining him, and save himself by an effort.

The dream was very sweet and pleasant while it lasted.

About twelve o'clock Mr. Sellford came in.

"Who's that young swell," said one City cad to another, in the body of the room.

"O, that is the dook's nephew," was the reply.

"Ah, I know; the Dook of Bevington. My ! ain't he got up spiffin'!"

"Yes. He's come after Mabel, you know. He's dead on there."

"Mabel Gray?"

"Of course; she in the shiny dress. There ain't two Mabels. She's a fizzer, strike me if she ain't!"

Mr. Sellford walked up to Mabel with the easy and familiar air of an old and privileged friend.

"Good-evening," he said. "I went to the Alhambra, and could not see you; so I have been strolling."

"How did you find me out here?" asked Mabel.

"By seeing your brougham outside."

"Will you sit down?"

"If I shall not be disturbing this gentleman."

There was a sarcastic emphasis on the word 'gen-

tleman' which did not pass unnoticed by Horace, who rose and stood near the counter.

"An old friend of mine—Mr. Brady," remarked Mabel. "I used to look upon him as a brother."

"Indeed!" said Sellford, who did not believe in brothers, and spoke dryly. "I wanted to tell you how I got on with Levy to-day."

"O, yes! I shall be glad to know. Was the interview satisfactory?"

"Very much so. He is dear, but I concluded a bargain with him, because you recommended him so highly and seemed to desire it, though I believe I could have got the money cheaper elsewhere. He consented to lend me ten thousand for three years, at sixty per cent, on my reversionary interest in the paternal estates."

"Is everything settled?" asked Mabel.

"Not exactly. It will be to-morrow, and I expect to have the balance at my banker's."

"Then you will take and furnish the house at Richmond?"

"Certainly."

"While it is being got ready, I should like to go to Paris."

"Wherever you like; though that will only be quitting one gay and festive scene for another."

Mr. Sellford seemed to have but one wish, and that was to do precisely as Mabel wished him.

She had him in thrall.

That little entity which beats under the left breast and which men call a heart, was wholly her own.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CITY MAN.

AN Englishwoman in Paris acquires an additional charm from being a little doubtful.

Mabel Gray made a sensation in the capital of the Sybarites. Her horses and carriages, made by the first coachbuilders in England, could not be matched in the Bois, or at the frequent races at Chantilly.

Her dresses were the best that Peter Robinson in Oxford-street could supply, and her bonnets were the pride of the Rue de la Paix.

She stayed at the Grand; and as George Sellford allowed her to draw upon him to an unlimited extent, she spent money in a princely manner.

After a stay of three months' duration, she grew tired of Paris, more especially as the season was drawing to a close, and that of London was commencing.

She had had one or two rows at the Mabilles, the Casino Cadet, the Café Anglais, Tortoni's. But that was nothing; it made her celebrated, and she did not make her appearance before the tribunal of the correctional police.

Mr. Sellford returned to England when she

wished him to do so, and purchased a pretty little house for her at Brompton. It stood in its own grounds, and was a most charming residence. But she soon saw that he did not love her. He was proud of being associated with her, and talked about her to his friends. His manner was cold, if not distant. There was no warmth or affection in his treatment of her, which grieved her very much.

She had learnt to love him in trying to forget Lord George Lumley.

Her passion increased day by day, and she begged him to marry her.

This idea he ridiculed.

She was firmly, entirely, and devotedly his.

While her affairs were in this condition—money abundant, horses, carriages, dresses, jewelry, luxuries of all sorts also abounding, and nothing wanting—but love to fill the void in her aching heart—an incident in her career happened.

One morning a handsome phaeton stopped near Mabel's house. It was driven by a man about five-and-forty years of age, dark hair, a thick-set frame, and a face remarkable for its hardness.

When he pulled-up the strong half-bred cob he was driving, he threw the reins to his groom, who was sitting respectfully behind, and said in a brutal tone, "Lay hold!"

He rang the bell himself, and a good-looking though rather impudent girl answered the summons. This was Rose, who for some time past had filled the office of confidential maid to Mabel.

She made him a sign, and he entered the garden,

stepping behind a tree, so as to be out of sight of those in the house and any passing in the road.

"Good-morning, Rose," exclaimed the new-comer in a voice which had something of the provincial accent which stamps a man as a Yorkshireman.

"How are you, Mr. Salkins?" replied the maid, with a marked absence of respect in her voice.

"Is your mistress up?" he continued.

"I don't know," replied Rose.

"How is that?"

"Mrs. Sellford is not at home."

"Not at home!" repeated the Yorkshireman.

"When will she be?"

"I don't know."

"Never mind; I'll wait for her."

"You need not give yourself the trouble," said Rose dryly. "I mentioned your name to my mistress yesterday, and she said she did not want to see you."

"That is all nonsense," cried Mr. Salkins, without being disconcerted; "you can manage it for me if you like."

"What do you want?"

"An interview."

Rose shook her head.

Mr. Salkins took out his pocket-book, which served him as a purse, and extracted a five-pound note, which he handed to the maid, who gave a start.

"You want to bribe me," she said.

"Take it."

She hesitated no longer, but took the bank-note, and conveyed it to the pocket of her dress.

"You can come into the house," she exclaimed. "But what if my mistress comes downstairs in a bad temper, and discharges me?"

"I'll take you into my service."

"You?"

"Yes; I will take care of you, if anything happens."

Rose smiled, and led the way into the house. The fact was, that Mabel had been out the night before, and coming home late, was not inclined to rise early.

Mr. Salkins was a speculator on the Stock Exchange. In judicious time-bargains he had made a considerable fortune, and in truth his wealth was all he had to recommend him.

The house was most magnificently furnished, and though every article was of the most costly description, perfect taste was apparent everywhere.

Throwing himself down on a sofa, the Stock-Exchange man exclaimed, "By George, only loose women can do the thing in this style!"

Rose had followed him into the drawing-room.

"Who pays for all this?" he added.

"You want to know too much," she answered.

Being a sensible girl, she thought that she ought to make him pay for any further information she might give him.

His first payment had admitted him to the house, and nothing more.

"I want to talk to you, Rose. Sit down," he said.

"I prefer standing, and I am not in the humour for talking; and—"

"Well?"

"When that is the case, I must be humoured, and paid for my time and trouble."

Mr. Salkins took the hint.

His book flew from his pocket, and this time he gave her a ten-pound note.

Rose sat down by his side.

"I have nothing agreeable to tell you," she said. "I have now been eight months in Mabel Gray's service. During that time I've received many a sovereign from you to take letters to her."

"Yes; and she has never taken the trouble or had the common civility to answer one," said Salkins, with a sigh.

"Do you know why?"

"No."

"I will tell you. Mabel is clever. She has a lover who keeps her, and she would be foolish indeed to compromise herself by writing letters to you."

"Does this man love her, this Sellford they speak of?" asked Salkins eagerly.

"He does not. There was a time when he did; but I can see that his passion is spent. Mabel appears gay and careless. There is always a smile on her lips at the Opera, at supper-parties, in the Park, and wherever fashionable people assemble. She knows numbers of men, but she invariably goes home alone."

"If I could see her and talk to her," exclaimed Mr. Salkins, "I believe I could persuade her to like me. This Sellford has no money. They say he is raising it all on bills. That sort of thing can't last. He's spending devilish near ten thousand a-year one

way and another. It can't last. I can calculate as well as anybody. I was a banker's clerk before I became a millionaire."

"Any one can see that," said Rose dryly.

The speculator looked at the clock.

"Your mistress ought to be up now," he added.

"She will get up when I call her," answered Rose; "and when she does, you will have to go, for she does not love you, though you may be devoted to her."

"That is surprising to me," remarked Mr. Salkins, whose vanity was a great point in his character.

"It does not astonish me."

"I've a couple of hundred thousand, and my position is such in the City, that I can always go and make some more."

"My mistress, unfortunately for you, loves the duke's nephew. If he is not so rich as you, he can get plenty of money when he wants it. All the evening when you see Mabel at the Opera, the Holborn, or at supper at the Pall Mall, she will be laughing or in good spirits. Once at home, she spends the night in weeping."

"If I could meet her then!"

"You haven't the chance," said Rose.

Mr. Salkins had recourse once more to his pocket-book. He thought everything could be done by the aid of money, and he was not far wrong.

Extending her hand, ornamented with pretty pink nails, Rose waited for the twenty-pound note he flourished before her.

"Not so fast," he exclaimed. "If your mistress

has those hours of silent sorrow, it will not be difficult for you to introduce me."

"We shall see. Give me the note."

"Wait a bit. Go on talking. You say Mr. Sellford, the Duke of Bevington's nephew, is keeping her. I know the name well enough."

"One thing is certain: Mr. Sellford does not know you."

"Why not?"

"Because gentlemen don't care about knowing men like—like—in fact, Mr. Sellford is not a Stock-Exchange speculator. He is not a City man, and would not know those who are."

"Yes, he would. Don't you make any mistake, my girl; he'd be glad to know me, if he thought I would discount his bills. All the swells are glad to come to the City when they want their paper melted."

"Yes, they make use of, but don't know you."

Mr. Salkins would probably have replied harshly to the girl's impertinence, had not a bell rung loudly.

Rose sprang up.

"My mistress is awake," she said.

"Let me see her. Here is the note—twenty pounds, see."

Rose took the note, and nodding her head, tripped away to attend upon her mistress.

Mr. Salkins anxiously awaited her return, wishing most sincerely that he could be the happy person upon whom devolved the cares of Mabel's toilette. He amused himself by thinking that he would have handed her various articles of wearing apparel, and

arranged her hair with the skill of a professed coiffeur.

Nearly half an hour elapsed, when Mabel entered the room in which he was sitting, dressed in a ravishing morning costume.

The speculator was still sitting on the sofa, and smiled as Mabel drew back on perceiving him.

Being accustomed to ride the high horse with women, who knocked under to him on account of his wealth, he neither rose nor took his hat off; but an angry imperious look which Mabel fixed upon him constrained him to do so at last.

Mabel gave him a stiff nod.

"Are you waiting for me?" she asked.

"Yes, m-ma'am," he stammered.

"On what business?"

She looked at him with supreme contempt, imagining that a man who would "ma'am" her must be a tradesman.

"I have not come exactly on business," he said.

"Why then are you here?"

Mr. Salkins had the pride of wealth, and it emboldened him.

"I have come for an answer to my letters," he exclaimed, hitting upon a happy thought.

"Your letters?"

"Certainly."

"O, you are the City man my maid has spoken about to me. Unfortunately for you, however, I have never opened your letters," replied Mabel.

"No?" queried Mr. Salkins.

Mabel pointed to a jar on the mantelpiece.

"There they are," she said.

Mr. Salkins rose and took a look inside the jar. There were all his letters put as he had sent them. The seals were all intact. Not in the least disconcerted, he exclaimed,

"In that case I had better tell you what is inside them."

And he sat down again with all the coolness imaginable.

Mabel was accustomed to meet with cads at public places. The brutes swarm, and frequently worried her with their vulgarity. But Mr. Salkins's insolence was unique in its way, and it almost stupefied her.

What could she do with such a man?

She thought of ringing the bell, and getting a servant to turn him out. That would have made a scene, and her nerves were not very strong that morning. So, taking a seat at some distance from him, she said,

"I will listen to you."

But she took a fan to hide her face from him, while she could watch him conveniently.

"I must begin by saying that my name is Samuel Salkins," he exclaimed. "I don't know why, but I have Jewish blood in my veins. I was born in Yorkshire."

"That is perceptible from your voice."

"I speculate on the Exchange."

"That is to be seen from your manner."

"I am not well educated."

"O," said Mabel, in a jocose tone, "I am sure

I ought to be obliged to you for all this information ; but I must say it was unnecessary. I am not slow of perception, and I had remarked all you have told me. May I hear something that is not quite so apparent on the surface ?”

“ I am rich. I hold shares in the different railways, in discount companies, in life-offices, insurance-societies ; and I have a lot of consols. In fact, I can get any amount of money I want.”

“ What has that to do with me ?” demanded Mabel.

This remark rather disconcerted the speculator ; as he said to himself, it “ knocked him off his perch, and sent him off his centre.”

He had expected to make a great hit with the declaration of his gold ; but he had missed the mark.

“ That ought to cover a few imperfections,” he said.

“ Stop a bit,” exclaimed Mabel quickly. “ You are floundering hopelessly in the mud. I must help you out of it ; we shall never finish else. You want to tell me that you are rich, and have got—”

“ Heaps of coin,” he put in.

“ And you want me to spend it for you ?”

“ Yes. I’ve been dying of love for you this six months.”

“ Poor fellow !”

“ I am alone in the world. There is no one to care for me ; and I need not make provision for any one. I’ve neither parents, wife, nor children ; and if you like to become *mar fum* as the French say, just *pro tem.*, why—”

"O, it is to be a time bargain," said Mabel, nearly choking with laughter.

"Well, yes; when a man starts a *sheer army*,—that's French too, ain't it?—the thing does not generally last long."

"Thank you for the information; then do I understand you clearly, that you do not wish to marry me?"

"Not exactly," said Mr. Salkins with a wink. Mabel rose with queenly dignity.

"That is enough. You offer me a house, furniture, diamonds, carriages, horses, money."

"Precisely."

"I have them already; so your time is thrown away."

"But—"

"Listen to me," she continued imperiously. "You have come here in a brutal manner to bargain for my love, or for the possession of my charms, just as you would bid for, or haggle over, some commercial article you wanted in the City. But I forgive you; it is your manner. I believe that you really do love me in your heart."

"May Godamyty—" began Mr. Salkins.

Mabel stopped him. "Don't swear," she said. "I was about to add, I cannot accept your offer."

The speculator turned pale.

"Look at me," continued Mabel. "I have laughed at you. I speak with animation. My eyes are still red; for I have cried in my sleep, and I shall cry again as soon as you are gone."

Mr. Salkins remembered what Rose had told

him, and was about to throw himself at Mabel's feet and urge his suit, when a loud knock was heard at the door.

Rose entered the room hastily.

"It is *he*!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Salkins stifled a curse between his lips, and feared he had lost his opportunity.

CHAPTER XIX.

BARGAIN AND SALE.

MABEL was equal to the occasion.

Opening the door of a boudoir, she took the speculator by the arm and pushed him in, saying,

“Wait.”

“How long?” asked he, not liking the prospect before him.

“Till he has gone.”

Mr. Salkins's eye flashed with a jealous fire. He would have spoken, but the door was closed; and sitting down on a chair he leant his head against the keyhole, so as not to lose a word that was uttered.

Mr. Sellford had driven to Mabel's house in his phaeton, which was the best that Windover in Long Acre could build.

Its excellences were many, but its extreme lightness was its chief characteristic. All Mabel's carriages were built by Windover, and they were the rage both in London and Paris.

Mr. Sellford had spent immense sums of money upon Mabel, and Goody Levy had advanced him several sums since the 10,000*l.*, of which we have spoken, was borrowed.

His friends grew angry with him for making

himself so notorious, and for spending so much money ; and the duke, his uncle, threatened to disinherit him, if he did not break-off the connexion, and marry a lady of fortune.

He had tired of Mabel ; and she, to her sorrow, had perceived it. In his manner, as he entered the room, his indifference for her was plainly perceptible.

Placing his hat and stick on the table, he threw himself into an arm-chair, and said, "Good-morning, Mabel."

She uttered a cry of joy, and exclaimed, "At last, at last !"

"For goodness' sake," he replied, "don't make a scene. You know how I hate it."

Mabel had thrown her arms round his neck ; but they slipped away as these cruel words were spoken, and she stood upright before him.

"It is eight days since I have seen you."

"What of that?"

"It is a long time. O, my darling !"

Mr. Sellford shrugged his shoulders.

"You are so demonstrative," said he.

"If you loved me, you would come oftener."

"My pet, understand, once for all, that I only come here to derive pleasure from your society. If you worry me, and make scenes, my object is defeated ; and as my nerves are not very strong to-day, I must really beg you to have a little consideration."

This was a long speech for Mr. Sellford. Mabel turned pale.

"I can see that I am slighted," she said.

Mr. Sellford seized her hand and drew her down on the sofa by his side.

"You are unreasonable, Queen Mab!" he exclaimed. "It is true that you are a very pretty girl, and I have made you my mistress; it does not follow that I am to pass all my time with you."

"If he only loved me as I love him!" sighed Mabel.

"My dear child, what have you to complain of? I have spent a fortune upon you. There's not a thing you have named, or I have thought or heard of, that has not been purchased for you. Your allowance is liberal enough, God knows."

"Leave me, leave me," she said.

"You have your perfect liberty," he continued.

"I want your love."

"You seem to me to enjoy all the advantages of a woman who is loved."

Mr. Sellford spoke in a tone of raillery.

"O, if you only knew what I have suffered during the last week!" Mabel said.

"You are unendurable," he replied, yawning; "I shall go. Perhaps, when I call again, you will be less excitable."

Mabel waited till he rose, then she attempted to detain him; but he repulsed her advances.

"Mabel," exclaimed Mr. Sellford, "a mistress is like a spirited horse—she must be kept well in hand."

His words fell upon Mabel like a shower of iced water.

She made him no answer.

He added, "Good-bye; I cannot bear being worried;" took up his hat and stick, and walked away

without bestowing another look upon her. She stood motionless, white as a ghost, her heart scarcely beating.

The front door slammed. The carriage-wheels sounded over the gravel. He had really gone.

Rose entered ; and one glance at her mistress was sufficient to show her that something unpleasant had taken place.

"O," she exclaimed, "if you continue to love him, he will kill you."

Mabel pressed her hand to her heart.

Rose thought she was going to faint.

"You are ill, ma'am," she exclaimed.

"No ; sudden changes are always painful," answered Mabel, speaking with difficulty.

"Changes !"

"Yes. I loved him ; now I hate him."

"That is spirited," said a voice behind them.

It was Mr. Salkins, who had just emerged from the boudoir.

He was rather red in the face, and there was the slightest suspicion of a tear in his large round fishy eye.

"Mr. Salkins !" exclaimed Mabel.

"Pardon me for listening," he said ; "I could not help it. I have heard—"

"What ?"

"All that passed."

Mabel trembled.

"What is your opinion ?" she asked.

"Your protector is a man without a heart. If he is a gentleman, as you say, his manners are the

reverse of good ; and if I were in your place, I would turn him up and make a change."

"That is one word for me and two words for yourself," said Mabel with a forced smile.

"I think there is a chance for me," he said.

"You are right, Mr. Salkins," she cried quickly.

"I have need of you, and of your gold."

"I'll ruin myself over you, if you like."

"That is an after-matter," replied Mabel; adding, "I will stifle my love for Sellford, and you shall take his place in this house. Do not talk to me now. Come to supper this evening. If I find, on consideration, that I have made a rash promise, I shall recall it; but everything is in your favour at present."

The speculator sank on one knee, and respectfully kissed the tips of her dainty fingers.

"At nine I will be here," he exclaimed; "and if you want any money now, I always carry a few thousands about with me."

Mabel touched a secret spring in an escritoire, which caused a hidden drawer to fly out, and reveal rolls upon rolls of notes.

"Let that be your answer," she said.

"All right. Let me add a few to them," replied he, placing a handful in her drawer which quite filled it.

Mabel smiled.

"At all events he is not mean," she said to herself.

He took his leave respectfully, and Mabel was alone with Rose.

She sank back on the sofa, and her tears fell like rain.

The paroxysm of grief did her good; for when a knock came at the door, she was so far recovered as to tell Rose to admit any one, and ran upstairs to wipe her eyes and arrange her hair.

Her visitors were four in number.

Sir Thomas Prendergast and Lord Prittvale, whom we have spoken of as the new plunger, arrived together; and while they were waiting to gain admission, up came Mr. Strickland Farcy, the first collector of old paintings in England, and Mr. Emmet O'Grady, the member for Ballysmash, which we need not add is in Ireland.

As they were all known to one another, they entered together, and while waiting for Mabel, got into conversation.

Sir Thomas Prendergast could talk about nothing but his illustrious descent, and how he was descended in a direct line from the Prendergasts of Cornwall, who flourished in the first century A.D.

Mr. Strickland Farcy was nothing if not engaged in conversation about pictures.

Emmet O'Grady was all parliamentary. He talked in the House and out of it. It was his one idea.

Lord Prittvale was a good listener, and sometimes they all talked at him at once, nearly driving him to distraction.

"I cannot say that I like very old pictures," exclaimed Lord Prittvale, in answer to a remark of Mr. Farcy's. "I echo the aspiration of Long-

fellows, that my friends would present me with something

‘Not from the grand old masters,
Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
Through the corridors of Time.’”

“Will you tell me, my lord,” replied Mr. Strickland Farcy hotly, “that there are twenty living rivals of Rembrandt and Murillo, Rubens and Velasquez?”

“Perhaps not; but my taste is so peculiar that I would rather gaze a second time at a Millais than at a Leonardo.”

“O, my dear sir,” said Mr. Farcy with rapture, “if you could only go to the National Gallery and arrange Rubens’ great pictures in one room, taking the Rape of the Sabines, the Brazen Serpent, Peace driving away the Horrors of War, the Judgment of Paris, and the Roman Triumph—what a treat you would have! What can compare with the Dutch and Flemish schools? Look at Rembrandt’s Children coming to Christ, and Rubens’ great landscape of the Château de Stein, and the Ruysdael, Cuyyps and Hobbemas; and look at that miracle of Pierre de Hooge, who has painted Night. Then take the French and German schools, the two Poussins, Nicholas and Gaspar, the Claudes—what is your Turner to Claude? Then the Van Eyks, and Martin Schoen’s Death of the Virgin; and after them the Italian and Spanish painters—Murillo, Velasquez, Guido, Caracci, Salvator Rosa, and Spagnoletti.”

After this infliction on the subject of high art,

Lord Prittivale was glad to turn to Mr. O'Grady and listen to him.

"O, art be bothered!" he exclaimed. "Ye don't know what high art is in this country—ye've no appreciation of it. Did ye hear, by the way, what I said of Rusk, the member for Barnsbury Park? Ye didn't. I'll tell you. Bedad, sir, it was the finest thing. I said he was like the underground railway, because he was the greatest bore in London. And I asked Lawyar the contractor if he started from Temple Bar to go 1760 yards citywards, where he'd stop, and he couldn't tell me, so I told him—at Mile-end! Had him there, eh? And I say, me lord, did ye hear what I said in the lobby yesterday to Prodder, the member for Smithfield, the City man? I said, sir, my ancestors were kings in Kerry when the honourable member's progenitors, if he had any, were curriers on Cornhill. And then Distin, the member for Northallerby, who never washed his face, they say, since he was born, came up and said, 'The Queen was going over to Ar-i-land. She might, but he'd take precious good care he didn't.' Well, what d'ye think I said? 'Mr. Distin says he has never been to my country. I don't think he ever will go. It's a place where the rain-fall is heavy, and he might get a drop or two of water on his face.' Ha, ha! That was good, eh? Bedad, sir, I said it."

Mabel now entered, and a footman brought wines and ice. Lord Prittivale was great at making cups, and he turned up his cuffs and began.

"I have taken the liberty, Mabel me dear," said the irrepressible Irishman, "of ordering you a velo-

cipede from Paris. If you would only start it in the Park, they would be all the rage, and I should make my fortune."

"How is that, Mr. O'Grady?"

"Because I am promoting an English and French velocipede company. I am projecting a velocipede club, and I shall pull considerable profits out of them both."

"In that case, I will take your velocipede out only—"

"Name your terms."

"You must make me proficient first. I believe a bicycle is not an easy thing to ride."

"Like skating—nothing when you're used to it," replied O'Grady.

A couple of pleasant hours were passed by Mabel with her acquaintances; but she was glad when they went, as she had to think how she should speak to Mr. Salkins when he called in the evening.

Should she accept his offer?

That was the question.

CHAPTER XX.

AN AFFAIR OF HONOUR.

ULTIMATELY Mabel decided to accept the offer which the City speculator made her.

She expected him at nine.

At eight she despatched a note to Mr. Sellford. He usually stayed at Long's when not with her, and he was dining with some officers, friends of his, who had just come up from Aldershot, on leave from Friday to Monday.

He happened to be speaking of Mabel.

It was tolerably well known everywhere that she was living under his protection.

"The fact is," he said, "I am getting wretchedly tired of the whole affair. But there's always a difficulty in these cases."

"Always!" observed Captain Mountjoy of the 10th.

"Do you speak from experience?" inquired Ensign Hincks.

"I am old enough to do so, and I do know from my own personal experience that it is an awful worry to get rid of a woman."

"I should have thought it the easiest thing possible," said Lieutenant Harper, also of the 10th foot

"Ah, my dear fellow, you don't know. Try it, that's all," rejoined Mountjoy. "I had as jolly a little woman as a man could wish to meet with in a day's march; and what happened? Why, the usual thing. I got tired of her, and fancied that while I was away, I was keeping her for other men, though I had not the slightest evidence of the fact, mind you. I made up my mind to cut her, and broke the news as quietly as I could, telling her that there was a certain sum for her every quarter at Cox's. She raved and stormed, took up a knife—"

"To kill herself?" queried Ensign Hincks.

"No, by Jove! That would not have mattered so much. Her idea was to kill me," replied Mountjoy with a laugh.

"How did it end?"

"O, she swore she would follow me to the end of the world; and I was obliged to exchange, and go to the Cape. Had a war on there at the time; Caffres and bush-fighting and all that. When I came home I heard she was dead."

"Of grief?" inquired Ensign Hincks.

"No, of drink."

There was another laugh at this.

"A letter for you, sir," exclaimed a waiter, giving one to Mr. Sellford.

"Read it for me, Hincks, will you?" exclaimed Sellford, handing it to him.

Sellford was talking in an animated manner to Mountjoy.

"I shall have to cut her, you know," he said. "What is your advice?"

"Tell her plainly," answered Mountjoy.

"Or write."

"Well, it doesn't matter. Either will do. I'll call and do the thing for you, if you like."

"Will you, though?"

"Certainly."

"So you shall. I'll take you at your word. By George, yes! Many thanks, old fellow, for the offer," said Sellford, adding to Hincks, "Well, what does the letter say?"

"It is from a woman, who says she has had enough of you and wants to see you no more. Gives you the cut direct, in fact, and adds, that if you come to her place, you'll find another man there. That's agreeable for you, Sellford. Fancy if Mabel Gray were to write like that!"

"She loves me to distraction—no fear of that," replied Sellford. "If you can't make out the signature, tell me the address."

"Molyneux House, West Brompton."

Sellford turned pale.

"Give me the note," he said.

"Stay a moment. Yes, I see the signature now. It is Ma—Ma—something—Mabel Gray. By George, I hope I have not done wrong in reading your letter aloud! You asked me, you know."

Ensign Hincks saw that the laugh was against Sellford, and feared he would not be well-pleased at the circumstance. Taking the letter and crumpling it up, he put it in his pocket, saying,

"It is her playfulness—we had a little tiff to-day—she does not mean it."

Captain Mountjoy turned the conversation into another channel, out of delicacy and respect for his friend, who remained silent during the rest of the time which elapsed before the party adjourned to the smoking-room.

He was aware that, by her prompt action, Mabel had turned the joke against him.

The day following he called, and was informed by Rose that Miss Gray had gone out.

"I asked for Mrs. Sellford," he said.

"Don't know such a person, sir," answered Rose.

"Not know her, when you are her own maid! What do you mean?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"I am Miss Gray's maid, sir; and I am to tell you that you will not be received here any more."

"Those are your orders?"

"Yes."

"This house was taken by me, and I paid for the furniture. Am I to be excluded from my own establishment, as I may call it?"

"The house was taken, sir, in Miss Gray's name. Mr. Goody Levy arranged all that, and he has a bill of sale on the furniture. Every precaution has been taken, sir. You can see Mr. Levy, if you like," said Rose.

"Tell your mistress to go to the devil!" exclaimed Mr. Sellford angrily.

"Perhaps, with your usual politeness, sir, you will accompany or precede her," replied Rose, with bitter irony.

Mr. Sellford made use of an angry exclamation, and went away.

This was his last visit to the dovecot, as he had often playfully called the villa in which he had installed his Queen Mab.

Mabel made no secret of her indifference to Mr. Salkins.

He worshipped her.

There was nothing that money could buy which was not bestowed on her; and if he received a kind word or a kiss in return from her, he was amply satisfied.

He was to her what a spaniel is to an imperious mistress—he fawned upon her.

Mabel said she should like to have a yacht; he bought her one, and had it taken into the harbour at Portsmouth.

The expenses attendant upon yachting were great; and Mr. Salkins came to the conclusion, that if a man wanted to spend money quickly, he could not do better than start a yacht.

We append a few of the bills which poured in upon him as soon as he became owner of the schooner yacht Zephyr, built at Cork, and always described as of that port. They will serve as specimens of the remainder.

Paid customs for register, great western dock, pier-dues, anchorage-dues, agency for attending to business, entry &c. at custom-house, and correspondence, shipwright's work, labour and materials, oakum, flagstaff and making, six feet of fir, three pounds of nails, handspikes, one truck for flagstaff, three sheets of copper, sail-needles, balls of white marlin, fish-hooks, elm plank, nails, whitelead, decklights, matches,

naphtha, boiled oil, Brunswick black, varnish, copper tacks, shark-hooks, &c. &c.

And so on over and over again.

Something was always being wanted ; and though the amounts appended to the several items were insignificant, the totals were not. Then there were men to pay, provisions and wine to provide, friends to be catered for and entertained, repairs to be done when the wind blew and knocked the ship about.

Thinking Portsmouth expensive, he laid her up at Gravesend in the basin.

Here one night, at the Nelson, he met a political agent named Hobson and his friend Mr. Chump. They persuaded him to let them get up a lottery for the yacht, by means of which he would get a large sum of money.

The idea was, to advertise the Gravesend spec in all the sporting papers, and sell tickets for the draw at 5*l.* a-piece.

Hobson was a tall pompous man with a game leg, which gave him a peculiar walk rather provocative of mirth. He was great at penny readings, where he usually took the chair.

His friend Chump was tall and stout, florid in countenance, which was of a Chinese cast. He was sanguine as to temperament, and took kindly to his beer. Between them they made a sad mess of the Gravesend spec. Very few tickets were sold ; the whole thing collapsed ; and Salkins was the sufferer.

Chump had paid more attention to his beer than he had to his business ; and when the crash came, Gravesend knew him no more.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LADY WITH THE BLACK GLOVE.

It was not in the nature of things sublunary that a refined and delicate woman like Mabel Gray could find any pleasure in the society of such a coarse and material man as Mr. Salkins, who disgusted those that came in contact with him by his grossness.

He was passionately enamoured of her; but she grew terribly tired of him, and he saw it.

Fortunately for her, he became ill, and getting worse, made his will, leaving her a handsome annuity in case of his death. He had no particular friends and no relations; so that his money was as well bestowed upon her as upon any one else.

Mr. Salkins died at Cowes, having caught a bad cold on board his yacht, which degenerated into bronchitis and killed him.

After this event Mabel Gray disappeared. Her most intimate friends did not know where she had gone to. Some said they had seen her in St. Petersburg, and others were equally positive that she was in Paris.

Horace Brady awoke one morning to a consciousness of folly. He saw that he was being rapidly ruined by a woman who did not care for him; and

having intercepted a letter from a captain in the army to Patty, he quietly gave her her *congé*; and finding that he had a few thousand pounds left, he started for the Continent in order to remove himself from the power and fascination of this terrible temptress, who had destroyed him once, and was endeavouring to repeat the facile process.

He had intended to go to Vienna; but he was so enamoured of Paris that he got no farther. Here he lived inexpensively and without show. By the exercise of economy he was satisfied his little capital would go a long way, and he intended to look out for some means of increasing his income or obtaining profitable employment.

In Paris it is easy to obtain entrance into that agreeable society which one calls the half-world. He made the acquaintance of a few students, with whom he met some beautiful sinners of the Breda quarter, who were as conspicuous in the Bois as they were popular at the Mabille. Among these butterflies of society was one named Corinne, a famous dancer, courted by all, and very beautiful. She invited the young men of the students' quarter to her parties; and Horace was taken to her house in the Avenue Marbœuf by Henri Rochfort, a young man who was following those studies which would qualify him for the profession of an advocate. Corinne was as much celebrated for the passion with which she had inspired an English nobleman as she was for her talents as a *danseuse*. This wealthy peer had offered to marry her, and had placed his purse at her service. Everything in her house denoted the almost un-

limited command of money, and the exercise of consummate taste.

The supper to which Rochfort took Horace Brady was given in a sort of winter-garden, artificially warmed, which was necessary, it being the month of January, and the table was laid in the midst of precious shrubs, brought from the four quarters of the world. Sweet-smelling flowers cast their fragrance on the air, and fountains of perfume rendered it still more delicious to the senses.

The wines had not ceased to flow since midnight and were of the first quality; a famous restaurateur had supplied the viands; and the company, ten in number, were enjoying themselves, there being nothing for the most fastidious to complain of.

During his stay in Paris Horace had not seen any woman with whom he had fallen in love. His heart seemed closed hermetically against the tender passion. The fact was, he had been badly treated by Patty Brooks; and though he liked the society of women, he hated the entire sex, because he had such just cause to complain of one woman. For her fault he visited all with his heaviest displeasure, and revenged himself, as he thought, by closing the avenues of his soul to the voice of love.

Nevertheless he had a remarkable fancy. The gay world of Paris was talking about a lady who seldom appeared in society, but who was occasionally seen in the Row, at the Opera, and on the Boulevards.

She was young, pretty, graceful, and always accompanied by an elderly lady. They appeared to

have the unlimited command of money, and lived in the best style, but were very exclusive. They had no acquaintances and no friends, and lived in retirement. There was nothing very peculiar in this, perhaps; yet the lady attracted attention from the extraordinary fact that she always appeared, morning, noon, and night, with one black glove. This was worn on her right hand.

From this circumstance she became known as the Lady with the Black Glove.

Though Horace Brady had never seen her, he fell desperately in love with the fair unknown. It was a mystery of the heart. He endeavoured to meet her without avail, and he persuaded himself that she was worthy of adoration. One of those strange and inexplicable longings which sometimes attack a man possessed him, and he confessed to himself that he should have no peace until he threw himself at her feet and avowed his passion.

He had confided this marvellous *penchant* for a person he had never seen, and only heard of in casual conversation, to Henri Rochfort, who did not laugh at him. The idea was thoroughly French, and Henri could perfectly understand it. It had been M. Rochfort's lot to love an abstraction; for every Frenchman has his ideal.

Corinne liked to gather round her table a few ladies of the stage and the ballet, some Bourse men, a feuilleton writer or two, some students, and those who, as a rule, were free from care, clever, dependent on their wits for their living, and could abandon themselves to the amusement of the hour.

The oldest of the company was a young man, a partner in a city bank, not yet thirty; the youngest, a girl of seventeen, who had made a sensation in a new piece at the Vaudeville. Corinne at one o'clock became confidential and somewhat serious. She looked round the table, and exclaimed, "My friends, I want to ask your advice."

"About what?" inquired Henri Rochfort.

"I fancy I know," exclaimed the actress; "Corinne thinks of marrying."

Murmurs of surprise arose on all sides.

"Yes," answered Corinne, "I am getting awfully old."

"How old are you?" asked Ernest Rollin, who wrote leaders for a minor journal.

"The question is one which should never be put to a lady," replied Corinne; "but as it is a matter of business, I don't mind answering you frankly. A woman has three ages—that which she really is, that which she says she is, and that which she makes people believe she is."

"Bravo!" cried everybody.

"I say I am twenty-three," continued Corinne. "I try to look twenty; but in reality I am twenty-seven."

"That is serious," exclaimed the banker; "a woman ought to look out at that age."

"If I do not marry, I think I shall be foolish. Lord Gavelkind would have me to-morrow, if I would but consent; and he is not the first Englishman of rank and wealth who has gone mad over me."

"My dear child," said Ernest Rollin, who as-

sumed a patronising air, "I am going to give you some advice. I know you won't follow it, because people who ask for advice never take it; they have arranged their plan of action beforehand, and only want to hear what people will say."

"That is paradoxical," observed the City man.

"A gay woman who marries," continued Rollin, "is like a Russian nobleman who is very rich, but who is compelled by the Czar to live in his snowy country on his estates. He longs to take as much money as he can with him, and come to France or England, and sacrifice the rest."

"I don't quite understand," said Corinne.

"Let me explain. Marriage for a woman like you is a Russia of the heart. When you enter the church, you will see written over the door the inscription which was placed over Dante's hell, '*Lasciate ogni speranza.*' In your Russia of the heart you will freeze and die. Your elderly husband will introduce you to prim, starched and proper ladies; and when you are shut up in some dreary castle, you will say, 'What would I not give to be once more with my old friends of the Breda quarter! dancing at a ball, or enjoying a supper such as those I used to give, and once more know the pleasure of drinking just a little too much.' I would rather see you the wife of an artist or an author, which would keep you in the gay world which you adorn so well."

"Nevertheless," said a pretty little woman, "if Corinne is in debt—"

"Not I," answered the hostess contemptuously; "I have more money than I want; and the English

lord who has loaded me with presents, he is a strange man. He has an idol at present ; but he is tired of her, because she is too quiet and cannot ruin him fast enough. He thinks that a wife will amuse him."

The company burst into a roar of laughter.

"That is a thoroughly English idea," said one.

"I wish I had enough money to live upon, and I was in your place," said Ernest Rollin. "Instead of marrying, I would try to make myself the incarnation of pleasure. I would imbibe a grand passion for a man who did not love me, and, overcoming all difficulties, conquer him at last."

"A man who is in love with a queen or an actress—two incurable passions and hopeless," said Rochfort.

"That will do for your next novel," said Corinne, laughing.

"Wait till you are Lady Gavelkind, and then you will realise the force of what I say," returned the young man.

"I shall think the matter over. To-morrow I shall make my mind up," replied Corinne.

"And change it twenty times afterwards."

"That is a lady's privilege," said an actress.

"Corinne," exclaimed Henri Rochfort solemnly, "if I might say half-a-dozen words in confidence to you, I am positive that you would for ever renounce the idea of marrying this English nobleman."

"Really?"

"On my word."

"I am curious to hear what you have to say."

"Come with me into the next room, if our friends will excuse us for two minutes."

There was a general chorus of assent; and Corinne led Henri Rochfort into an adjoining apartment.

The young man seated himself by her side on a sofa, and said,

“ I flatter myself I have read your character and know your disposition thoroughly. Obstacles irritate, but at the same time fascinate you. You like to overcome difficulties.”

“ Yes,” she murmured.

“ Nothing would please you so much as to engage in a romantic amour, bristling with impediments almost insurmountable. This would excite your imagination, brace-up your nerves, and arouse your pride.”

“ You speak like a book,” said Corinne; “ but unhappily—”

“ Well ?”

“ Unhappily such amours are not to be found. All men love me too easily. I have the fatal power of making old and young worship at my shrine. Nevertheless—”

She paused and hesitated.

“ Nevertheless,” exclaimed Rochfort, “ you would be delighted to meet with a man who was blind to your beauty, and deaf to the charms of your voice; one of those who pass through a crowd with lowered eyes, a pensive brow, and a closed heart, absorbed by one of those adorations—idolatrous, if you like—which take possession of their whole soul, thought, and being; a man who would see the sky fall, and not be alarmed, except for the darling of his heart.”

"You speak the truth," said Corinne pensively.

"Ah, my little tigress with the pink nails," cried Henri Rochfort triumphantly, "have I not read you rightly?"

Corinne fell into a mysterious abyss of thought.

Her companion indulged in a soliloquy.

"I should like to see you, thing of marble that you are," he said, "desperately enamoured of one who could only regard you as a friend. I could watch your eye flash with a jealous fire as you beheld him sigh at your successful rival's feet, while he mocked your siren's voice and your dangerous smile, and your hands trembled to tear the life out of the heart of the happy recipient of his love."

Corinne was deeply agitated. Her large black eyes burned with a celestial fire, and her breast, exposed by a low dress, seemed to tremble with the fierce storm that was raging within her.

"Yes," she said, "I should like to meet with a man who would regard me with indifference and disdain, who would shrug his shoulders with a smile when I gave him to understand that I was in love with him. It would indeed be a new sensation. But you deceive yourself, Henri. We are poets, you and I. We dream of these things, and forget that men are vain, cowardly, fond of pleasure, and essentially false. Such a man as you describe does not exist."

"Pardon me; it is you who deceive yourself."

"I?"

"Certainly. I know just such a man as we have been speaking of, and I want to introduce him to you."

"You know this man?"

"I do," Henri Rochfort replied coldly.

"Is he young?"

"Young, handsome, intelligent. A gentleman; and if not rich, apparently well off."

"That is nothing; money does not matter. You say he loves?"

"He has at the bottom of his soul one of those violent and mysterious passions of which it is difficult to tell the object, and which devours his life. Some woman, angel or demon, has bewitched him, and since that time his life has been an enigma. It is for you to solve it."

"My dear boy," said Corinne, with a sad smile, "I tell you, if you bring this man to me, he will love me."

"When you are Lady Gavelkind you will not be at liberty to seduce the affections of young men."

"I have determined never to become his lordship's wife."

"Bravo! That is something. That shows me that you intend to undertake this conquest. Yes, yes; I know you well, my beautiful tigress. You scent your prey afar off; but you will never conquer this man."

"Who is he?" asked Corinne impatiently.

"One of my friends," answered Rochfort.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

HENRI ROCHFORD was not mistaken. Corinne could make no impression upon Horace Brady. She tried very hard to make him love her, and tried all the harder because he did not return the advances she made to him.

He was in love with the lady with the black glove—that is to say, with a woman he had never seen—at least he thought so.

But one evening he saw the lady at the Opera, and to his amazement he found that it was his old friend Mabel Gray.

The money that Mr. Salkins left her had rendered her independent; and she went with it to Paris, changing her name, and trying to lead a respectable life.

She called herself Amy Waterlow, and took with her a middle-aged woman of lady-like appearance, whose acquaintance she made in London. Her name was Mrs. Ellis,* and her antecedents would not bear looking into. She called herself Mrs. Waterlow, and passed as Mabel Gray's mother.

Mrs. and Miss Waterlow were desirous of meeting some rich man, whom the latter would entrap into a marriage.

The fact of her wearing a black glove on one hand was a clever trick to attract admiration, and get herself talked about.

In Paris she made the acquaintance, at a *table-d'hôte*, of the handsome, fashionable, but unprincipled Sir Robert Hale, a baronet, who, it was reported, had at an early age run through the best part of his fortune, and lived in extravagant style, no one knew how; though his detractors said he was a gambler, and knew how occasionally to procure runs of luck.

However this may be, Sir Robert Hale continued to live in very good style, and mixed in capital society. He made himself as agreeable as he possibly could to Mabel, and piqued her by saying at an early stage of their intercourse,

"I am terribly afraid of being in the least degree civil to you, Miss Waterlow."

"May I inquire why?" she asked.

"Because I should lay myself open to the reproach of being a fortune-hunter, and my enemies already say things bad enough of me," was his shrewd reply.

"It is a dreadful thing, then, to have money, Sir Robert?"

"Not at all. To me it would be a very pleasant thing, and so enchanting, from its novelty, that I should like it all the better."

Amy smiled.

"However," continued the baronet, who, in the language of bird-catchers, well understood how to lime the twig,—“I shall not be deterred from making myself agreeable to you from fear of anything

which the most malevolent and evilly-disposed person can invent to my prejudice. If any one is to blame, it is yourself. You should not really be so charming in your person, and so fascinating in your manner."

No woman was ever more fond of flattery than Mabel had become. This speech went direct to her heart, and she thought Sir Robert Hale the most agreeable man she had met with in the course of her travels.

It was his wish and intention to make her believe that he really cared for her; but he was one of those men who have had at least one sincere affair of the heart in their youth; and when that is the case, they can never really love any woman again.

Mrs. Ellis did not like the baronet; she admitted that his society was entertaining, and that he told the most amusing stories, and was generally nice when with ladies. She had, however, heard sad stories of his profligacy. It had not escaped her ears that he was a gambler, and she dreaded lest Mabel should marry him.

The fact was, that two fortune-hunters had met, and that it was a question which was the most clever. Mabel thought she would like to be the wife of a baronet, and Sir Robert fancied he should like to marry a woman who was both pretty and rich—the latter as far as repute went.

While this flirtation was going on between Sir Robert Hale and Mabel Gray *alias* Miss Amy Waterlow, Horace Brady happened to see her at the Opera, and he, finding out her address, called upon her.

Strangely enough, the passion he had conceived for the fair unknown with the black glove transferred itself to his old friend Mabel.

She could not refuse to receive him, but begged him not to tell any one who she really was, and what she had been when he first knew her.

He gladly made her this promise, and she told him that she had been left some money by a relation, and was obliged to change her name by the terms of the will; all of which Horace implicitly believed.

In conclusion, she begged him not to visit her again for a few weeks; her reason she did not give him; but as he began to love her, he did not ask any questions, and was glad to obey her.

It was indeed strange that these two should meet as they did, and that Horace should lose his heart to Mabel.

While he was away, Mabel was privately married to the baronet, against the advice of Mrs. Ellis, who did not like him. Mabel wished to be a lady of rank.

"At least," she said, "I am a baronet's wife, and shall be addressed as my lady, and that is something. I have nearly six hundred a year which Salkins left me; that is enough to live upon; and I think I have managed remarkably well."

Sir Robert and Lady Hale went from Paris to Brussels, and from thence to Vienna, and other towns and cities on the Continent, returning to Paris, which was Sir Robert's favourite resting-place. Here he had many friends and associates, whose characters were not the most immaculate; and here he could

indulge that mania for gambling which, some said, had been his ruin, and kept him poor.

But a few weeks elapsed before he began to make requests to Amy for money, which she complied with. Her fortune was well invested, and brought her in six hundred a-year; but, as her husband's demands upon her purse increased, she found the balance at her banker's begin to grow slender.

The love which Sir Robert lavished upon her, and the attention which he showed her, made her anxious to please him in every particular; and she did not refuse him money, so long as he confined his demands to small sums; but when his requirements became extravagant, she refused to supply him any longer. It was then that his talent for dramatic acting was called into play.

About two months after their marriage, Sir Robert's necessities got so pressing, that he was absolutely compelled to put in practice his designs against his wife's fortune, which had been slumbering, not abandoned.

They were lodging in a quiet hotel in Paris, and their apartments were sumptuously furnished in the Louis the Fourteenth style. Sir Robert had been depressed for days, and Mabel had in vain rallied him as to the cause of his depression. He came in at six o'clock to dinner; but, though the table was supplied with luxuries excellently cooked, his appetite failed him, and he scarcely ate any thing.

With her own hands she poured out some champagne, and asked him to drink it.

"If it will please you," he answered in a desponding tone.

"It will indeed," she answered. "You neither eat nor drink; and conversation, which had such a charm, seems to have lost all interest for you—why, I am at a loss to imagine."

Replacing the glass of wine on the table untasted, he exclaimed, "Shall I tell you why, dearest?"

"You will oblige me greatly by doing so," she rejoined.

"I have lavished a wealth of love upon you," he said; "that you have yourself admitted more than once. I have introduced you to some society, and made you a lady of title. A countess could only be addressed as 'my lady,' as you are. Wherever we go, you are looked up to as Lady Hale, while I am talked of as a poor miserable fortune-hunter; and people deride me, because they say I am at your beck and call, and that you can, and do, give me a few pounds now and then to spend, when you are in a generous humour."

"O, Robert!" she cried, much hurt, "I am sure you do what you like with our income."

"That is not it," he answered. "It is the principal over which I ought to have control. If you had confidence in me, you would make everything over to me. You ought to know me well enough, by this time, to understand that I should not abuse the trust."

Mabel made no reply, but beat the floor impatiently with her right foot.

"I can bear the taunts of my acquaintances no longer," Sir Robert went on. "My former position was far preferable; and I think, dearest Amy, that

unless some alteration is speedily made, I shall have to return to my old habits and ways ; in fact, we must agree upon a separation."

" A separation !" echoed Mabel in alarm.

" Yes ; and yet, when I look upon you, I cannot find it in my heart to tear myself away ; you are so exquisitely lovely."

In fact, Mabel looked her best that night. She wore a handsome black silk dress with a low body, which revealed her beautiful bust ; her hair was carefully waved, and there was a pleasant, happy smile upon her face, usually so wanting in expression of any sort. Sir Robert laid his cigar down on the table. She took it up, and held it for him, while he drank the wine she had poured out, and which he extended at arm's length before he drank, to give more effect to what he was going to say ; and she, leaning back in her chair, looked languishingly before her, as if she wished to fascinate him once more into giving her that love which he threatened to withdraw.

" We have been very happy, Amy," he exclaimed ; " but my pride is more to me than domestic happiness, however alluring I may have found that, owing to your kindness and love. We must separate, unless you can place full confidence in me. I have no ill-feeling towards you—none in the least. You are quite right to refuse to trust me, and make me the master of the house in every sense of the word. See, I will drink your health, and wish you may be happy without me."

He placed his arm on the back of the chair, and

fixed his handsome black piercing eyes upon her, immediately afterwards emptying his glass.

"What is it you require of me, Robert?" she asked, after a momentary pause.

"I have told you," he answered coldly.

"You ask me to make over my fortune to you. O, this wretched money! I wish it had never been given to me! But you shall have it. What are the steps necessary for me to take to transfer my right in it to you? Tell me, and it shall be done to-morrow."

"My darling!" he exclaimed, with difficulty containing his rapture, "you are too good, and I was wrong to doubt your love for me. I will by my conduct in the future show you how I appreciate your self-sacrifice."

At this moment a servant announced Mr. Horace Brady.

"A friend of yours, my dear?" asked Sir Robert, who turned pale.

"Yes. Do you know the name?" she replied.

"I do," was all he could say.

The next minute Horace was in the room, staring from one to the other with undisguised astonishment.

"My husband, Sir Robert Hale," exclaimed Mabel.

"If I am not mistaken, we are acquainted," said Horace. "No, it cannot be a mistake; but how is it that my old friend Major Rastock is metamorphosed into Sir Robert Hale?"

"Major Rastock!" ejaculated Mabel, sinking into a chair.

"Certainly he cannot deny that such is the designation I have always known him by."

Mabel looked at the supposed Sir Robert for an explanation.

"Mr. Brady is right," he answered. "I have deceived you, my dear. There is no such baronet as Hale. I took the name to fascinate you, and have succeeded. You are my wife, but not a lady of rank. In future, know me as Major Rastock. The fact was, I happened to be short of money, principally owing to the unwillingness of our young friend here to enter into my schemes, and hearing that you were a big fish in matrimonial waters, I angled for and caught you. That is the whole story, my dear Amy."

"Amy!" repeated Horace, "why not Mabel? It appears you have been deceiving one another."

"Mabel!" cried the exposed Major jumping up, "Mabel what?"

"Gray."

"The devil!" said the Major between his teeth.

"Come, confess," exclaimed Mabel, laughing, "that we have both played our parts in this little comedy remarkably well. I came over here with a few hundreds a-year a man was good enough to leave me, and hoped to make a good marriage. You were animated by the same virtuous and highly commendable intention; we met, each under an assumed name, and we married. Now the farce is over, the best thing we can do is to separate."

The Major put on his hat, and furious with rage left the room without saying a word. He was beside himself at having been taken in.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PERSECUTION.

AFTER the singular discovery that Mabel had made through Horace Brady's instrumentality she returned to England.

Major Rastock really cared for Mabel on account of her beauty, and he determined to have what money she had got. He was in want of funds ; having relied upon Horace's compliance with his schemes. He wanted him to commit a crime to get wealth, which Horace had refused to do ; and having been unlucky at the gaming-table, he went over to Paris, as we have seen, and assumed the name of Sir Robert Hale, with which title Mabel was so deliciously deceived.

The Major's persecution of Mabel became so intense that she asked Horace to protect her, promising to return his admiration and love for her, if he rid her of the Major, who gave her no peace.

Horace would have done anything to gain Mabel's love, for he found her more fascinating every time he saw her ; and he made inquiries respecting Major Rastock, in whose good character his faith had been shaken by recent events.

He found out that he had some years back committed a forgery in the south of France, and was a

mere adventurer. He had escaped from a French prison, and would be very welcome to the police of that country, who knew him under the name of Hammersley.

With this news Horace flew to Mabel, who was delighted. She wanted above all things to be free from the Major's persecution, and she allowed Horace to take her hand in his, raise it to his lips, and murmur something of an amorous nature.

"My dear Horace," she said, "before I consent to listen to words of love from you, I must have my mind perfectly at rest. There must be nothing to worry me; and while I know the Major is free, and dogging my footsteps, setting mines and traps under my feet, and rendering my position generally insecure, I can listen to nothing."

"I have been thinking of all that," replied Horace Brady.

"Indeed!"

"I have told you this Major Rastock is an escaped French convict."

"It is so."

"The only chance, then, of silencing him would be to have him arrested."

Mabel made a gesture of impatience.

"You know very well," she said, "that the English law will not permit us to do that."

"The English law, yes; but the French—"

"Ah, that is another thing."

"I will get him to France; and once there, I will take very good care that he has no chance of escaping from the toils which I will spread for him."

Mabel was so excited at the pleasant prospect which Horace Brady held out to her that she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed his forehead.

"Do this for me, Horace, and—and—"

She hesitated.

"You will become mine? Is it not so? Is not that what you were about to say?" cried Horace, trembling all over.

"I will," she replied in a low voice, allowing herself to sink into his arms.

"Are you ill?" he asked anxiously.

"A little faint, dear Horace. Lead me to the sofa, and bring me some wine. I shall soon be stronger; 'tis but a passing weakness," she answered.

He conducted her to the sofa, and gazing admiringly at her for a moment, poured out some wine from a bottle which stood on a chiffonier.

She drank it, and sighing, handed back the glass.

"What a lucky woman I must be, Horace, to be loved by a man like yourself—so good, so handsome, so noble in disposition!"

"Ah, no," responded Horace; "it is I who am fortunate in having the chance of winning so lovely a creature as yourself. To be loved by you is happiness indeed. I could willingly pass all my life at your feet."

"Do you forget that Antony lost a battle, which lost him a kingdom, by dallying with Cleopatra?"

"He was in the right. What would I not sacrifice for you?"

"I believe you are devoted to my interests."

Sinking on his knees by the side of the sofa,

Horace seized her white arm, and pushing the sleeve up to the elbow, covered it with kisses so hot and passionate that they seemed to scorch the alabaster flesh. She did not attempt to check him for some time, but at length, with a woman's tact, she withdrew her arm, and told him to rise.

"Let me kneel at your feet, Mabel," he pleaded.

"If you like," she replied, thinking it best to humour him; for his love for her was driving him to distraction; adding, "will you really rid me of my enemy?"

"I have no doubt I shall succeed in doing so."

"How do you propose to act?"

"In this way," answered Horace Brady. "I will attack him, and put him into a large wooden box which I will have prepared. He shall be gagged, but holes in the box will admit air, so that he may breathe. Then I will take him over to France as if he were a bale of merchandise."

Mabel smiled.

"What an extravagant idea!" she exclaimed.

But as she reflected, she saw that although extravagant, it seemed perfectly feasible. There was nothing whatever in it which seemed to preclude the possibility of success.

"Where is he best known in France?" asked she.

"He resided for some time in Avignon. But that does not much matter. If we had him at any part of France, such as Calais or Boulogne, for instance, he could be arrested."

"He might, however, get on board some ship

before we could persuade the police of his identity. No; take him to Avignon, by all means, if he is known there."

"As you like," said Horace, seeing the force of this remark; adding, "is not Avignon in the south of France?"

"I believe so, though I never was there. You will find a *Gazeteer* on the table. Consult it, and you will gain all the information you require."

Horace took up the book and read aloud:

"Avignon, a large and beautiful city of France, the capital of the department Vaucluse, seventy-six miles by railway from Marseilles, and fifty-one miles in a direct line. It is situated on the left bank of the Rhone, just above its junction with the Durance. The streets are narrow; but the city contains several beautiful churches, a fine old cathedral, and other public buildings. The palace formerly occupied by the popes is built in the old Gothic style, and stands on the southern slope of the rock of Doms. The town is surrounded by a fine avenue of trees fully three miles long."

"Is that all?" asked Mabel.

"No; it goes on to say: 'Avignon, while under the dominion of the popes, was a much more interesting town than it is at present. It then contained sixty churches, among which was that of the Cordeliers, which contained the tomb of Laura de Sade, the Laura of the poet Petrarch. Its site is now converted into a fruit-garden, and a cypress-tree indicates the spot where Laura is interred. A railway connects the city with Cette, and the great trunk-line

connects it with Lyons and Paris. Constant communication is kept up by steamers and railways with Marseilles, Lyons, and Arles.' ”

“ There will be no difficulty in getting there,” said Mabel. “ When you start, I will communicate with the police at Paris, and let them know that I have reason to believe that Major Rastock is at large in Avignon ; and they will promptly send emissaries to arrest him.”

“ If he is a high-spirited man,” exclaimed Horace Brady, “ his rearrest, and having to go back to complete his sentence, will have such an injurious effect upon him that he will die.”

“ Let us hope so,” replied Mabel. “ If it should so turn out, my life will be rendered happier ; for the one great stumbling-block in the way of my felicity will have been removed.”

It will be seen that Mabel was thoroughly implacable. She could feel no pity for the man, and talked of his probable death with as much equanimity as she would have talked of the death of a fly.

Such was her power over Horace Brady that he was imbibing her demoniac instinct.

On leaving Mabel, Horace sought out a carpenter, and had a box constructed of large size, being about nine feet by six. It was lined throughout, and made comfortable enough ; for Horace had no wish to cause the Major's immediate death.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STRATAGEM.

HORACE BRADY had some chambers in Duke-street, St. James's; and he wrote a letter from that place to Major Rastock, in which he asked him to call upon him.

"I wish to talk to you very particularly; and if you will favour me with a call to-morrow morning or the next day, I shall esteem it a great favour."

Horace was domiciled on the ground-floor; and a sharp ring at the bell brought Alphonse, his French valet, to the door. In reply to an inquiry as to whether his master was visible, Alphonse responded in the affirmative, and conducted the visitor to a sitting-room to which the reader has been already introduced.

Against the wall stood what Major Rastock conceived to be a packing-case of large dimensions. He regarded it curiously. Of what possible utility in a gentleman's sitting-room could such an extraordinary thing be? Was Horace Brady about to move? That could scarcely be. The lid was placed carelessly against the box, and the Major felt strongly inclined to examine it closely, for the holes perforated in the lid puzzled him more than anything else; when Horace

Brady made his appearance. He smiled almost imperceptibly when he beheld his visitor examining the box, for it was the singular case which he had ordered for the purpose of transporting him to France.

"Good-morning, Horace," exclaimed the Major, retiring from the box, and rather ashamed of the curiosity he was afraid he had been detected in displaying; "you see I have made no delay in answering your summons."

"Many thanks for your courtesy," replied Horace, seating himself, and motioning to his friend to do the same.

"I trust your affairs are progressing favourably?"

"Very much so."

"May I, without giving you offence, take this opportunity of openly stating my regret, Mr. Brady," he added, "that you should blindly allow yourself to be swayed by a woman who is wicked and unprincipled?"

"Sir!" began Horace, his face flushing.

"Pardon me. I did not intend to hurt your tender susceptibilities, but I felt it incumbent upon me to warn you against Mabel Gray. I know her, and you do not. Some months ago I was as madly infatuated with her as you are yourself; but I contrived with some of her own cunning to worm a few secrets from her. Now I intend to overwhelm and crush her."

"Never, while I breathe!" cried Horace excitedly.

"O," said the Major coolly, "it is easy to see that you are under the spell, and that nothing I can say will influence you against her."

"Nothing; you but waste your time in supposing that you can prejudice me against her."

"Nevertheless, I will say that you will find out your folly before long. She will make use of you, and then cast you off. She will trifle with all your tenderest feelings. What do people do with an orange when they have extracted the juice? they throw the useless rind away. So will it be with you. Be warned in time."

"Pray oblige me by changing the subject," exclaimed Horace Brady, trembling violently, as if he found it difficult to restrain his anger.

"With pleasure," replied the Major, biting his lip.

"And now, what refreshment can I offer you? Nothing? Don't say no. A glass of wine?"

He touched the bell as he spoke, and Alphonse entered. His master ordered him to bring some wine; and while the domestic was occupied in obtaining it from the chiffonier, the Major said, pointing to the packing-case,

"I am afraid you will laugh at my curiosity, and think me rude into the bargain, but I should very much like to know what you have, or what you intend to put, in that large deal case."

"You shall look into it, if you like," answered Horace.

He rose, and his guest did the same. They stood before the case, when Horace made a sudden sign to Alphonse, which passed unnoticed by the Major, who without any warning was seized from behind by the French valet, and had his arms pinioned securely before he precisely knew what had happened to him.

Horace Brady, seeing that his interference was not called for, walked to the mantelpiece and leant carelessly against it.

When Major Rastock had sufficiently recovered from the state of stupor into which this proceeding had thrown him, and when he could summon sufficient breath to his aid, he fixed a glance of malignant hatred upon Horace, and exclaimed :

"Sir, what does this outrage mean? and what am I to understand by your extraordinary apathy while I am attacked by your servant?"

"It is the will of Mabel Gray," replied Horace, lighting a cigar with the utmost *sang froid*.

"Mabel?"

"Precisely. Mabel Gray, against whom you railed just now. That packing-case in which you took such an interest is fitted up as a travelling-carriage."

"For whom?" demanded the Major, turning deathly pale.

"For yourself."

"And whither am I to go?"

"That, at present, is a secret. Your life, however, is safe, if that is any consolation to you."

"I will not submit. I will call for assistance. Such an outrage as this cannot be perpetrated in a large city like London, in a civilised age, and in the best part of the town, without attracting some attention. Help! hel—"

"Gag him!" said Horace Brady to his valet, meaning thus effectually and promptly to stop the clamour which the Major seemed inclined to raise.

Alphonse promptly took hold of a gag made of leather, and forced it into the Major's mouth with as little compunction as he would have forced a bit into the mouth of a horse. His arms being bound behind him, he was unable to offer any resistance.

When he was rendered thoroughly helpless, he saw the absurd folly of which he had been guilty, and admitted, when it was too late, that he should have been more cautious. His indignation was excessive. He resolved, if ever he should recover his liberty, to repay with interest the heavy debt he owed to Horace Brady. His prospect of release, however, appeared remarkably remote at present.

Alphonse consulted with his master for a brief space, and then loosened the rope which bound the captive's arms, so as to allow his hands to hang down by his side. Then he gently pushed him towards the box, removed the lid, and caused him to lie at length within it. Afterwards the lid was put on, some bolts were shot into their places, and Major Rastock was as effectually a prisoner as if he had been shut up in the lowest dungeon of a French prison.

The whole proceeding had taken place with such rapidity that the Major could scarcely realise his position. He was able to breathe, and his condition at first was not absolutely uncomfortable. His life he imagined to be safe; but what his captor intended to do with him he was utterly at a loss to imagine.

Horace Brady, in conjunction with Mabel, had laid his plans with the greatest cleverness. He was afraid of travelling by railway and the ordinary steam-boats, because the packing-case was too large to be

admitted into a cabin or a carriage, and if put in the hold or the van, other packages would be placed upon it, the air-holes stopped up, and the captive, being inside, inevitably stifled.

Mabel remembered that she had a yacht, which had been left her by the late Mr. Salkins. This yacht had never been put out of commission. She occasionally used it, and it was now lying off Gravesend, under the command of Captain Morton. A telegram was instantly despatched to Gravesend to Captain Morton, commanding that worthy skipper to make instant preparations for a voyage to the Mediterranean, which would be commenced about the middle of the next day.

The Zephyr had not been used by its mistress for some time, and Captain Morton was delighted at the news. She was a handsome steam yacht, built for endurance as well as speed, and as well-built a boat as ever was launched.

Mabel's own carriage was sent to Horace Brady's lodgings, and the packing-case was placed like a lady's imperial on the roof, and then securely strapped. Horace Brady speedily followed, Alphonse jumped up beside the coachman, and within an hour and a half from the time of his calling upon Horace, the Major was on his way to Gravesend *en route* for France. To Horace's great delight, Mabel had condescended to come with the carriage, intending to travel as far as Gravesend with her lover, in order to encourage him in his career of crime, and keep him steadfast in his devotion to her interests.

Horace had not expected this, and he drew back,

when, on placing his foot on the step, he was about to enter the carriage.

"Come in," said Mabel, remarking his hesitation. "I wish it."

The next instant he was sitting respectfully opposite her, and the carriage had started.

"Sit by my side : we can talk better," she continued.

Obedient to the slightest command, he shifted his position, and was soon in close contact with the idol of his heart.

She smiled upon him, and said, "I am very much pleased with you, Horace. You have done everything I have requested you in a most successful manner, and I accompany you to-day, not because I fear some failure, but I wish to thank you personally, and to introduce you to the captain of my yacht, whom I shall tell to regard you as the owner in my absence ; for it is necessary that he should obey all your orders."

"Certainly," said Horace ; adding, "with regard to your praise, I value it most highly, because I believe that by serving you I may most surely find my way to your heart, and found myself securely in your affections."

"Yes," cried Mabel, catching eagerly at that, "rest assured that by obeying me, and studying my interests, you materially promote your chance of becoming my husband !"

"Would that I could this day claim your hand and lead you to the altar !" cried Horace rapturously.

"It is impossible ! All persecution must cease

—my enemy must first be silenced. When this is accomplished, then, and not until then, can I talk to you of love, or suffer you to talk to me,” replied Mabel decidedly.

“ If all is left to me, the time will not be far distant. I—I care not what I do to gain your love, Mabel. Shall I cast your enemy into the sea, when no eye is fixed upon my actions? Shall—”

“ No,” answered she quickly; “let him live to suffer. He shall see how I will foil him. No, let him live; there is excitement in a war like this, and he shall not die—at *present* !”

These last words she uttered almost under her breath.

Horace breathed more freely. He could not help feeling rejoiced that the post of executioner was taken away from him, for a time at least. Yet he could have done it—he could have hurried the soul of a fellow-creature into eternity, with all his sins upon his head, if the lovely siren by his side had bidden him to do so.

Never did a follower of Brahma feel a more slavish devotion for his god than did Horace Brady for this woman. The poor heathen throws himself beneath the car of Juggernaut, and is horribly crushed to death under its iron-shod wheels. Horace, the man of intellect and cultivation, would gladly have laid himself down in the road, and have allowed Mabel’s fiery, thoroughbred horses to trample the life out of him, and mangle him beyond the power of recognition, had she but raised her little finger.

This may seem exaggerated, but it is true. His

love for Mabel was not a passion only—it was idolatry and madness unadulterated.

“Every day, Mabel, my love for you increases, my passion becomes more insupportable!” he exclaimed. “I begin to feel that I cannot live without you—your divine presence is indispensable to me! If you were an Oriental princess with unlimited power, and I could be the humblest of your slaves, I should not care what menial drudgery fell to my lot, so long as I could be near you, and my eyes could feast themselves upon your peerless features!”

“Some day, dear Horace, I will make you happy,” answered Mabel, smiling radiantly upon him. “Such love as yours deserves reward. I will show you that I am not cold, thankless, and indifferent, when you have done *all* I require of you.”

All! That little word dashed his hopes.

“My happiness may be postponed indefinitely,” he exclaimed sadly. “You may require so much—yet if it must be so, I will not repine. You can never ask too much of me. I am yours to raise to an earthly heaven, or dash into the fathomless abyss.”

She smiled once more; and he, emboldened, raised her delicately-gloved hand to his lips and kissed it lovingly; and he would not let the little hand escape from his until they reached their destination, she suffering him to fondle and caress it, as a judicious mother allows her child to make much of a plaything.

The Zephyr was anchored opposite the clubhouse, and a boat was moored alongside the wharf or landing-place. The carriage stopped abruptly. Mabel

stepped out, and Captain Morton, who was standing hard by, doffed his cap. It was now nearly four o'clock.

"I hope you are well, miss," said the skipper.
"Quite a pleasure to see you again, I'm sure."

"Thank you, captain," Mabel replied, "I am well. May I trouble you to see that packing-case safely stowed in the state cabin? Do you, Alphonse, accompany it, and wait on board the yacht your master's coming, which will be in the course of the evening. Captain Morton, I shall expect you in an hour at the New Falcon."

"I shall not fail you, ma'am," rejoined the skipper.

Reëntering the carriage, followed by Horace Brady, who had seen the packing-case safely taken down, Mabel Gray was driven into the town.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON BOARD THE YACHT.

MABEL could not forgive Major Rastock for the deception he had practised upon her, and she was very desirous to put a stop to the visits he paid her, asking her for money, and taking her jewelry when she refused to supply his wants. Therefore she was very particular in impressing upon Horace Brady the paramount importance of successfully managing the undertaking he had in hand.

She had promised to marry him when he had removed all the enemies who now annoyed and molested her. She even permitted him to regard her as engaged, and to indulge in those trifling familiarities which lovers think so much of—such as squeezing the hand, gazing amorously at one another, and stealing an occasional kiss when no one happens to be looking.

After a dinner at the hotel in Gravesend, Mabel returned to town, having taken a most affectionate leave of Horace; the latter going on board almost immediately afterwards with Captain Morton. The tide serving, the anchor was weighed, and the yacht steamed down the river. Horace Brady retired to his cabin, and proceeded to unfasten the wooden box

in which the Major had been confined for some time. He was faint and exhausted ; his limbs pained him, owing to the cramped position in which he had been kept for so long a time. He looked at Horace with a supplicating expression—the implacable hostility he had before displayed had disappeared. The confinement and the uncertainty of his destiny had conquered the stubborn spirit within him—at least it was conquered for the time, whatever might result afterwards. Lighting a cigar, and sitting down near the case, Horace Brady exclaimed,

“ You are now on board a yacht, whose destination I do not choose to tell you. That you are my prisoner, and entirely in my power, there can be no doubt. All on board are devoted to me, and you would have no chance of effecting an escape should you be inclined to do so. I am willing to treat you as one gentleman should under all circumstances treat another ; that is to say, I will give you your liberty to a certain extent, if I have your word of honour that you will make no attempt to leave this cabin.”

Major Rastock made a gurgling sound, as if to draw attention to the gag with which he was hampered. Horace promptly removed it, in order to allow the captive to reply to his question. With some difficulty the Major contrived to articulate. Seeing that he was parched with thirst, Horace gave him a glass of wine, which he poured down his throat.

“ I have to thank you for more kindness and consideration than I expected,” Major Rastock exclaimed ; “ and I willingly give my *parole* as you request ; though I should like to know what you intend to do

with me, and why I have been attacked and treated in such an extraordinary way."

"That I cannot tell you," replied Horace, as he cut the cords that bound him.

Sitting up in the case, the Major at length recovered the use of his limbs, and sat upon a chair, drinking two or three glasses of wine, and greedily devouring some biscuits which stood upon the table.

"I have no actual ill-feeling towards you," said Horace Brady; "but—"

"As you are the agent of another, you consider yourself bound to act to my prejudice," put in the Major hastily.

Horace was silent.

"I am a man of the world," continued Major Rastock, "and I can guess what you intend doing with me. Mabel Gray, that vile traitress, and viler—"

"Stop!" cried Horace imperatively. "If the first use you make of your recovered freedom and speech is to abuse a lady to whom I am devotedly attached, I shall begin to repent of my clemency and good-nature."

"I beg your pardon. The scales have fallen from my eyes, but I must make allowance for your feelings. I was about to say that Mabel has ordered you to take me to the coast of France, where I am liable to arrest. Now I have a strong objection to be arrested and incarcerated in a French prison; therefore I shall, with or without your permission, take the earliest opportunity of going on deck and endeavouring to reach the shore."

This address, made with great composure, was so

totally different to anything Horace Brady had expected, that he was completely surprised.

“Your word—”

“Is worthless.”

“I thought you were a gentleman, and that I could rely upon you, or I would not have suffered you to—”

The Major interrupted him, saying, “My dear fellow, in the sort of game which you and I are playing, honour is laid on one side. What amount of honour did you display when you decoyed me to your chambers? Was I not the victim of the grossest treachery? The fact is palpable. Do you suppose for a moment that I, with my senses about me, am going to allow you to fasten me up in that box again and lead me, like a lamb to the slaughter, to the *bagne* at Toulon? Not a bit of it. I shall fight you with your own weapons.”

“Soh!” exclaimed Horace Brady, “my generosity is to be requited with this black ingratitude! However, you seem to have forgotten one important particular. If you succeed in conquering me, which is not very likely, you will have to run the gauntlet of my men on deck; and you may imagine that I shall treat you with rigour after your infamous breach of faith.”

“I will risk all that,” answered Major Rastock, who was insolently defiant.

He helped himself to more wine. That which he had already imbibed, acting upon an empty stomach, mounted to his head, and he was becoming slightly intoxicated. Horace Brady beheld this with

satisfaction. His prisoner's chance of making his escape was, to say the least of it, remarkably small.

Suddenly the Major seized a small cutlass which was hanging upon a couple of nails, and whirling it round his head, warned Horace not to come near him. Horace was not particularly anxious to receive a sabre-cut, so he contented himself with touching a bell and shouting for assistance.

His call was promptly answered by the skipper in person, who met Major Rastock ascending the companion. They came in contact with some violence, and the Major, losing his footing, was precipitated heavily to the ground. Horace Brady, guessing what had happened when he heard the fall, issued from the saloon and grasped the Major's collar as he rose from his prostrate position.

"Some thief, Captain Morton, who has concealed himself in my cabin for the purpose of committing a felony," said Horace Brady.

"Indeed, sir," replied the skipper, regarding the prisoner carefully.

"Yes. Put him in irons. I hold you responsible for his safe custody," continued Horace.

"If you are, as I suppose, the captain of this vessel," put in Major Rastock, "I beg of you to do nothing foolishly and without thinking. I am not a thief, but a gentleman, brought on board in a packing case, and—"

At this declaration Captain Morton laughed aloud. His merriment drowned the Major's voice, and he went on laughing till his sides fairly shook again.

"No, no," he said; "I can stand a yarn as well

as most, but you don't get me to believe such a tough one as that."

"As there is a heaven above us, I speak the truth," reiterated the Major.

"I'm a rough fellow enough in my way, but I don't like blasphemy," said the skipper.

"I tell you I am the victim of a conspiracy."

"So I should think."

"You will recognise the fact some day."

"How do you like it?" answered the captain derisively

"Take him away," said Horace Brady angrily; "and remember, Mr. Morton, that you are his keeper."

"I shall not forget," replied Morton, taking a firm hold of his prisoner, and dragging him to a place of safety, where, with the assistance of the watch, he heavily ironed him.

Captain Morton fully believed all that Horace Brady had told him. It was quite possible that a man could have concealed himself on board for a felonious purpose; but that Horace should have brought him with him hidden in a packing-case was absurd in the extreme. The more he thought of it the more he laughed.

Running down the Channel, they met with rough weather in the Bay of Biscay, which retarded their progress considerably. The rough weather increased to a storm, which afterwards became a tempest.

Captain Morton was terribly alarmed. The sea swept over them and extinguished the engine fires, so that their auxiliary screw was of no service whatever to them. He communicated his fears to Horace

Brady, who had not anticipated this unpropitious state of the weather.

As for Major Rastock, he was rejoiced to hear from the seaman who communicated with him at stated intervals, that there was a chance of the yacht being wrecked. He would take his chance of safety with the others; for he trusted that the humanity of the captain and crew would, in the extreme peril which threatened them, remove his fetters.

The coast was neared; and the captain having lost all control over the vessel, owing to the rudder having been swept away, held a consultation with Brady.

"I fear," he said, "that it will be impossible to weather this storm; we shall be driven on the rocks, and must go to pieces."

"God help us!" replied Horace, becoming very pale.

"There is one thing, sir—"

"Well, what is it?"

"The thief we caught in the saloon must not be allowed to sink with the ship. I think his fetters ought to be knocked off, so as to give him a chance with the rest."

Horace Brady thought a moment, and then replied, "Certainly not. Let him sink."

"Common justice, and—"

"Never mind. I think you have received instructions from your employer to obey my orders?"

"I have," replied Captain Morton.

"Your chance of increased pay depends upon her favour," pursued Horace.

"It does, sir."

"If you refuse to—"

"Murder this man—that's what it amounts to," broke in the captain with the impetuosity of a sailor. "No, sir, I distinctly refuse to do any such dirty work; and if I starve for it, I will knock the irons off that man, and give the poor wretch a chance of his life; yes, even if he were the greatest criminal that ever existed. Who knows whether we shall be alive by this time to-morrow? I have enough on my conscience already, without adding a fresh crime to the burden."

"You refuse to obey me?"

"I do, sir, in this particular instance," replied Captain Morton.

The captain and Horace Brady looked angrily at one another. Major Rastock's life hung, as it were, in the balance.

Horace Brady saw that it would be foolish to provoke the captain to extremities. He and the crew together could master him, so he sullenly acquiesced in his proposal to liberate the prisoner. Had not this been done, Major Rastock must inevitably have been drowned.

Captain Morton went on deck, and with his own hands unloosed the fetters which confined the prisoner's limbs.

"Whoever you may be," he said, "and whatever your motive for coming on board was, I will not see you drowned like a rat in a trap."

"Thanks, my worthy friend," replied the Major. "If it please God that we should escape the effects of this tempest, I shall not forget your kindness. I am

not what you take me to be. A woman has resolved upon my death, and the gentleman whose orders you obey is, through her instrumentality, to be my executioner."

Captain Morton looked compassionately upon the liberated captive, scarcely understanding the full force of what he said, but feeling intuitively that he was an injured man. He could not spend any more time with him, as the yacht required all his attention.

The sea was running very high. The coast of France was dimly visible in the distance; and as their auxiliary screw could render them no assistance, the yacht was rapidly drifting upon a ledge of rocks. It was now evident to the veriest tyro that though the catastrophe might be postponed for a time, it could not be finally averted.

Horace Brady came on deck. He had provided himself with a cork-belt which he hoped would keep his body above water when the yacht went to pieces. Major Rastock stood in the stern watching the progress of the storm, and calculating the chances of ultimate escape, which seemed few indeed.

A huge wave broke over the vessel, and washed away the man at the helm, who, with a despairing cry, scarcely audible in the fury of the tempest, sank in the trough of the sea to rise no more.

The Major instantly took his place, and, receiving his orders from the captain, endeavoured to do his best towards saving the ship.

It was a terrible moment for all on board. The sea drove the yacht upon the rocks, and she almost instantly went to pieces.

At the time she struck, Horace Brady and Major Rastock were not far from one another. After sinking into the water, they rose nearly opposite each other, some little distance from a low sandy shore. A terrible light burnt in Horace Brady's eyes. In his belt he had a knife, which he contrived to draw from its sheath; and, with death staring him in the face, he endeavoured to slay a fellow-creature !

Major Rastock, unarmed and battling fiercely with the waves for dear life, was apparently at his mercy. Horace made a plunge at him with the sharp dagger-like knife; but, at the critical moment, a prodigious wave caught him up and carried him to the shore.

An hour afterwards two men, thoroughly exhausted, were lying upon the sand, removed from the effects of the sea. They were the Major and Horace Brady, who were rescued from the jaws of the deep by a special interposition of divine providence. They were the sole survivors of the wreck.

Pieces of the yacht strewed the shore, and more than one dead body, fearfully mutilated, was to be seen dashing helplessly against the sharp jagged rocks. Day was over, and night came on.

The Major made an attempt to drag himself to a distance from his companion. He feared his treachery and his violence. For a moment he was almost tempted to take up a bit of rock, and knock his brains out. But his better nature prevailed; and to his magnanimity Horace owed his life; for at that time he was incapable of protecting himself.

It was a great temptation. No one could have

accused him of murder, for Horace's death could have been put down to the effects of the late storm.

The night passed, and day broke upon a calm and placid sea, no longer angry and disturbed. Traces of the wreck were to be seen in every direction.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A WOMAN'S GRATITUDE.

IN the morning Horace Brady was startled by hearing groans proceed from the place where Major Rastock was lying. He instantly went to him, and inquired if he was ill.

"My good fellow," answered the Major faintly, "I am dying—I feel it. During the storm I received some internal injury, and the agony I suffer is unendurable. I forgive you for your share in my death. You are in love, and I know what it is to have a grand passion for a pretty woman."

Horace expressed his regret that he should be so unwell, and hoped that his fear might be groundless, though he secretly desired his death.

"It's no use sorrowing over what cannot be helped," continued the Major. "I am booked, my lease has run out; and I'll tell you, Brady, why I have always taken an interest in you. I could have proved you to be the son of my old friend Brady. I was a respectable man once, and moved in good society until poverty—or rather a dread of it—made me an adventurer. The man who inherited your father's wealth is old. I wanted you to hasten his end by giving him a peculiar poison which I have. It is

difficult, if not impossible, to trace. When he died, I would have brought you forward with forged documents; and as there are no heirs, you would have been unopposed, and got everything. It was a bold scheme, eh? But one you could not manage to carry out without my help. Pity you were so scrupulous; double pity you met with the she-wolf who has brought me to this."

"We were old friends, Mabel and I," answered Horace. "I knew her when she first came to London; but I never thought I should love her as I do now."

"Perhaps I am wrong to blame her," the Major went on. "It is not pleasant to be deceived; but then she took me in, and that is a set-off against the deception I practised upon her. Lady Hale! It was a tempting bait; but the woman has been too much for me, and it is not the first time I have been worsted by a woman. By God, boy, if you knew my history, you'd rather cut your right hand off than have anything to do with women. They are the curse of a man's existence. Mix in female society occasionally, but have no familiar and continuous acquaintance with them which may ripen into love. Woman is the lesser man. Her range of intellect is lower than that of a man; treat them all as inferior cattle. Let them not presume upon your condescension in talking to or knowing them; and if you find a woman beginning to love you, fly her as you would a pestilence."

While speaking, Major Rastock had worked himself into a state of excitement, which was highly in-

jurious. A rush of blood came to his mouth, and he was unable to speak again. Horace Brady tended him carefully ; but though he lingered during the day, he died before sunset.

Thus was Mabel's enemy removed from her path by a singular mixture of accident and design. Horace made his way along the coast to a fishing-village, where he obtained aid and succour, and in a few days returned to England. His first visit was to Mabel, who heard the news of the Major's death with pleasure. She was once more free, could look forward to a period of peace ; no more would the so-called Sir Robert Hale worry her for money. She was free, and could call herself her own mistress ; though, as a matter-of-fact, she was just then looking forward to being somebody else's. A gentleman of fortune and position was paying her marked attention.

Horace Brady's return annoyed her. His eternal sentimentality tired her. Besides, she was now a woman of the world. She had made use of him, and did not want him any more. He was not a catch ; she required a much richer man than him upon whom to bestow her favours. Horace Brady told her that he had done all she commanded him, and asked her if she felt that she could now let him love her.

She gave him an emphatic negative, and said that she had changed her mind, and did not think she could love him ; it was best that they should part.

"Talk not of parting, Mabel ; it would kill me," he pleaded. "I would have done more for you, if I could. Let me be devoted still to your interests."

"No," she answered resolutely. "It is to my interest that I should dissociate myself from you. Go!"

He lingered, loth to believe what he heard.

"You are a gentleman, Mr. Brady; therefore you cannot insist upon remaining in my house when I have requested you to withdraw."

He bowed at this reproof, and said:

"You have sent from you a truer heart than you will ever meet with again. Fare you well, Mabel, and may God be merciful to you!"

It was a relief to her when he was gone.

"He is too fond," she said to herself. "He would sicken me, were he my husband, with his everlasting sentimentality, his eternal worship. He would never let me out of his sight. He would be always at my feet, and I should have my own way in everything. He is so weak. I like a man who can say a woman nay, and set his will against hers, and conquer her. That is the sort of man I could respect, and—yes—perhaps I could love him in time."

The effect of Mabel's dismissal upon Horace Brady was peculiar in the extreme. At first he staggered from the room like a drunken man, and reeled along the streets until he reached a tavern. Entering this *Avernus* he called for a shilling's worth of brandy, and drank it raw to steady his nerves. Presently the reaction came, and instead of the weak supplicating thing he was, he became strong, furious, determined—strong to achieve, furious to conquer, determined to possess. He vowed that Mabel should be his, and his only. How he kept that vow we shall see.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DESPERATE LOVER.

A FORTNIGHT elapsed, Mabel had not seen Horace again, and remained in the dark as to his plans. He was not idle, however.

One night, ordering her carriage, Mabel went to the Opera. Her old friend Mrs. Ellis had accompanied her, but feeling unwell, had gone home after the first act, sending back the brougham to fetch her friend Mabel, who would have to return by herself.

Mabel left rather earlier than usual. It was a Verdi Opera, and she did not care much about Verdi's music. Her mind was preoccupied and she was desirous of being by herself and quiet.

Her brougham was soon brought under the portico. Stepping in, the door was shut, and the carriage drove off at a rapid pace. The fair adventuress fell asleep, and remained so for nearly an hour. When she woke up she could see no houses, no lamps, and yet the brougham was careering along rapidly.

The moon was shining brightly, and she could see the hedges and the green fields. She was in the country; what could it mean?

Becoming very pale she pulled the check-string

violently, but the coachman whipped up his horse and merely accelerated the pace at which he was going.

The men on the box of the brougham paid no attention to the evident distress of Mabel, who continued to pull the check-string with great violence. At length it broke. She sat with the string in her hand, the picture of amazement and despair. Could she have discovered who was abducting her—for an abduction it was, and this was patent to the meanest comprehension—she would not have taken the affair so keenly to heart. But she could not obtain the slightest clue to the identity of her abductor.

She gazed out of the window, and saw that the horse which drew the carriage had slackened his speed. The trees no longer seemed to dart past and run into one another. Everything was distinct and palpable. Presently the brougham stopped, a man dismounted from the box, opened one door of the carriage, and boldly entered.

Mabel shrieked. The man disregarded her fright, took a seat by her side, and shut the door sharply. This was a signal for the driver to proceed.

Once more the brougham rattled along the macadamised road.

Mabel Gray was alone with a man. He did not keep her long in suspense.

"Mabel," he exclaimed, "do you not know me? I am the man you once professed to love—a man whom you induced to sin for your sake—one who loves you madly."

"Horace!" ejaculated Mabel.

"Horace Brady. You know me now."

Mabel felt more at her ease now she knew she was with no one more dangerous than Horace Brady. She could twist him round her finger as she would a skein of thread. So she thought. Once there had been a time when she might have so moulded him; but the man had greatly changed since then. He was no longer soft and pliable; no longer to be manipulated this way, and that way, as the dictates of her ever-varying caprice ordered.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" she asked. "Why am I carried off in my own carriage, and subjected to this annoyance by a man who says he loves me?"

"It is the very violence of his love which prompts him to act as he has done," answered Horace Brady.

"How can that be? Love is not true love if it causes uneasiness to the object of its passions."

"Then Heaven knows, Mabel, you never loved me," said Horace bitterly.

"Did I ever profess to love you?"

"You led me to believe that you did. You held out reasonable expectations that you would reward me by marrying me."

"You misunderstood me," she replied uneasily.

"Of course. It is easy to say that. But you are right. I did misunderstand you. Now I know you. I can see that you made a tool of me, not really caring one jot whether I lived or died in your service. You traded upon my affections."

He spoke loudly and excitedly. She did not remember to have seen him in so peculiar a condition.

Had he been drinking, or was his mind slightly affected? She began to grow slightly afraid of him. Her former feeling of ease and assurance wore off. He might be dangerous after all, and she was entirely in his power. The night was dark, the road lonely, the coachman bribed to act as he was told.

"You had no right to expect that I should marry you," she said, in a soothing tone. "A lady has a right to select her own husband, and not be driven into an alliance she detests."

"Why did you marry Major Rastock?" he asked. She was silent.

"It is incomprehensible to me," continued Horace. "Here is a man whom you employed me to murder—let us not mince terms—and I did my best to fulfil your wishes."

"You are unkind," she said.

"If being just is being unkind, I am so."

"Let us talk about other matters which more nearly concern me," said Mabel, recovering her composure and her dignity. "Why, I repeat, am I carried off, and what are your intentions respecting me?"

"I scarcely know," answered Horace wildly. "I swore you should marry me; I will keep my word, come what may."

"You are jealous."

"Madly jealous. I would rather see you—you whom my soul dotes upon—lying dead at my feet than know that you were the angelic being who made the heaven of any other."

"This is madness," said Mabel.

"It may be," replied Horace gloomily.

"Think, if you are capable of calm reflection," she added, "think, I beseech you, what the result of your conduct will be. You cannot keep me driving about in a ball-dress in this brougham day after day. You must alight somewhere."

"What then?"

"Of course I shall take the first opportunity of making my situation known, and kind friends will spring up on all sides, who will release me from your tyranny."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Horace Brady in the wild manner which seemed to have become habitual to him, "I have laid my plans with more judgment than that."

"I am at a loss to imagine in what way," said Mabel, sorely perplexed.

"Listen to me. We shall soon stop at a wayside inn. There you will be received by two strong women, who have been obtained by me from a lunatic asylum. They are under the impression that you are mad, and will treat you accordingly. Every one will be informed that you are insane, and then you will obtain no commiseration from a single soul."

"And then?" asked Mabel in a stony voice, born of despair.

"Then a carriage will be provided which will carry us—that is to say, you, I, and your attendants—by easy stages to Gloucestershire."

"Why to so remote a place?"

"Because I have bought a retired country house near the ancient city of Gloucester. Here my will is

law. I will bury you in a strict seclusion, from which, I swear as there is a God above us, you shall only emerge as my wife."

She heard him to the end patiently. Seeing the cunning and forethought with which he had laid his plans, and the difficulty there would be in escaping from him. With her characteristic pliability, Mabel threw a glance full of affection upon Horace, and said in a low, sweet, thrilling tone,

"You shall not take all that trouble, my poor dear Horace, to make me yours. What do I care for anything? You love me far more dearly than any one else, and you have proved it. I will be yours, and yours only."

Horace Brady shook his head with an incredulous air.

"Once, Mabel," he replied, "such a speech would have transported me into the seventh heaven of delight; but now—"

She regarded him blankly. Was he beyond her power of fascination? Could she no longer sway him as she pleased?

"Now?" she said beneath her breath.

"Now I mistrust you. My programme shall be carried out to the letter. A friend of mine, a priest at Gloucester, shall make us man and wife, if you are of the same mind when we arrive there."

"What!" she cried, "am I to be subjected to the terrible ordeal of which you have sketched the outline?"

"Most decidedly."

Mabel threw herself back in the brougham, and

cried and sobbed as if her heart would break. Horace Brady took little or no notice of her ; he knew the woman he had to deal with. He had sketched his plan of action, and until he had accomplished his purpose he was as hard as iron or adamant. Nothing could move him.

Recovering herself when she saw that her tears had no effect upon him, and that her distress did not at all affect him, she changed her tactics.

She was in evening dress, as we have said. Her alabaster shoulders were bare. The opera-cloak which she had thrown over them on quitting the Opera had become unfastened, and fallen off ; her gently-heaving bosom, white as snow, rose and fell at each respiration. Her arms, graceful and symmetrical, shone like polished ivory.

She was eminently lovely, and Horace Brady could not but confess the fact as he gazed amorously upon her.

Suddenly she slipped, as it were, from the seat on which she had been sitting, and fell at her austere lover's feet. She embraced his knees, and gazing at him as she knelt upon the mat on the floor of the brougham with tear-stained eyes and face, she implored him to give her his confidence.

"See, dearest Horace !" she cried ; "I am kneeling—kneeling, dearest, at your feet. You cannot be so obdurate, so hard-hearted, as to refuse to forgive me if I have offended you."

Horace Brady shook his head again.

"I cannot trust you," he said.

"O, do not say so."

"You are an angel, but you have at the same time all the attributes of a demon."

"You were wont to play with the tangles of my hair and say you loved me," she persisted. "See," she added, taking a tress of her lovely hair in her hand and showing it to him; "this is the hair you loved, Horace. Look at it—look at me—am I changed? Have I become hateful in your sight? O, no—a thousand times no. I will not believe it."

"Rise, Mabel," replied Horace. "What I have said, I will adhere to. Once arrived at Gloucester, the length of your captivity depends entirely upon yourself."

With a cry like that of a tigress deprived of its prey, Mabel resumed her seat.

Her teeth grated angrily, hysterically together, and she dug her nails into her flesh until the blood came.

She glared at him with the ferocity of a famished wolf. What she would have done, or what she would have said, it is difficult to conjecture; but the carriage stopped abruptly.

Two women made their appearance, issuing from a public-house of a low order, and assisted Mabel to alight. This she did with an ill-will, but she was afraid of being dragged forth.

The women, ugly and repulsive specimens of their sex, placed themselves one on each side of Mabel, and conducted her into the house. She was led to a room in which there was a bed, and told that she might retire to rest whenever she pleased.

Fatigued more by her violent paroxysm of passion

than by anything else, Mabel threw herself, dressed as she was, upon the bed, and soon fell into a profound slumber.

The next day she was compelled by her attendants to change her dress for one more suited for travelling. In vain she complained to these women, and told them who she was, and promised them immense rewards if they would allow her to escape. They laughed at her distress, and ridiculed her pretensions.

Horace Brady adhered rigidly to his programme. They started for Gloucester, and reached his house, the Priory, at the expiration of the seventh day.

Mabel was conducted to a suite of apartments, which had been prepared for her with great care. The same attendants were allotted her.

By this time she had become morose and sullen. She seldom spoke. Her appetite deserted her, and she was brooding over her wrongs as she called them.

Horace Brady could make no impression upon her. It was in vain that he endeavoured to engage her in conversation. She was silent and stolid, apparently unconscious of his presence.

Surprised at this, which was totally different from what he had expected, Horace Brady did not know in what way to act. He still kept her a close prisoner.

Visiting Gloucester one day to procure his beautiful captive some rare and expensive fruit as a token of his regard, he beheld a small apothecary's shop.

It was very poverty-stricken, and the apothecary himself, who was standing at his door, looked more than half—say three parts—starved.

An idea occurred to Horace Brady, which he lost no time in putting into execution.

The apothecary, with a sigh at the absence of business, retired into his shop. Horace Brady followed closely upon his heels.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LOVE-POTION.

THE idea which had so felicitously occurred to Horace Brady will be presently explained. He despaired of making Mabel love him, or even treat him with common civility. She invariably told him that she would hold no intercourse with him until she was set free. This he did not choose to entertain for a moment.

But to return to the apothecary.

"You, my friend," said Horace Brady, "seem to have studied the art of the chemist and herbalist, if one may judge from the specimens which I see around me."

"Sir," replied the apothecary in a sepulchral voice, "my whole life has been devoted to the cause of science, and you can see how my art has rewarded me."

He grinned a ghastly grin as he spoke, which served to reveal his toothless gums, and exhibit his lantern-jaws in all their hideousness. Horace gave him a sovereign, and said,

"Take that as an earnest of my good-will."

"What am I to do for it?" said the apothecary, holding the coin between two fingers.

"I want to know if it is possible, by any combina-

tion of simples or of minerals, to gain the affection of a particular person?"

The apothecary reflected a moment.

"I have," he said, in a slow and deliberate tone, "a mixture, the strength and virtue of which I have never ventured to try. But if my art does not deceive me, the potion of which I speak will cause any woman to whom it is administered to love you with the fondness and devotion of a spaniel."

"Why have you neglected to experiment with it?" asked Horace.

"I have been in doubt about the action of one herb."

"What is your doubt?"

"If I am mistaken, a terrible result will follow."

"And that is?"

"A partial deprivation of the power of thought, an obscuration of the intellectual faculties, which, though not idiocy, is very dreadful to contemplate," answered the apothecary.

"That *may* ensue," said Horace Brady; "you do not say it will. But you are sure of the other property, that of compelling love?"

"On that I will stake my reputation."

"Name your price," said Horace. "I will buy your potion, let the consequences be what they may."

"As the risk I run is great, and punishment will be sharp and speedy if aught evil comes of this day's bargaining, I must have ten pounds," answered the apothecary.

"Thou ill-omened starveling, thou scarecrow!" replied Horace, "'twill be a fortune to you for six

months. No matter; you shall have what you demand. Prepare your potion; I wait impatiently for its completion."

For fully half an hour the apothecary was occupied in preparing his mysterious and uncertain drug. When it was completed, he gave it in a small phial to Horace, who secured it about his person, paid the money required, and left hastily.

Be the result what it might, he resolved to administer it to Mabel. To be loved by her, whether in the full possession of her faculties or not, was happiness such as he had not dared to hope for.

Returning home, he sought Mabel in her confinement, and found her angrily pacing the room. Turning to him, she exclaimed fiercely:

"How much longer is this absurd farce going to continue?"

"That depends entirely upon yourself."

"How upon myself?"

"Agree to my proposals, consent to be my wife, and there is an end of what you are pleased to call my persecution," said Horace."

"I have already told you that I will do no such thing. I will not be coerced in this way. Release me," she said petulantly, "and then I will exercise my discretion."

Mabel hid her face in her hands, and wept. She had done very little else lately. Her proud spirit was crushed by the weight of oppression and ill-treatment which she had been obliged to bear.

"O, this is too cruel of you. Too—too cruel," she sobbed.

He did not answer her. He had found it best to let her grief have vent. On this occasion he waited until in a feeble voice she asked him to give her a glass of water.

Here was an opportunity to administer the potion. The liquid was perfectly colourless, and utterly devoid of taste or smell. This much the apothecary had told him. For a moment he hesitated. But only for a moment. The delightful prospect of being loved by her upon whom his heart doted was irresistible. He fancied he already felt her arm clinging round his neck, and her sweet kisses raining upon his lips.

Walking to a side-table, he poured out a glass of water, and dextrously emptied the contents of the phial into the glass without being detected. This he handed to Mabel. And she took it in her hand, and gazed at it, holding it before her for some moments, until Horace Brady was fearful that he had been discovered. His knees trembled, and he turned pale. So great was his agitation and suspense that he was obliged to sit down.

"I have wondered whether you would poison me," Mabel exclaimed. "You have ample opportunity. What is to prevent you?"

"Poison you, Mabel?" he ejaculated.

"Yes. Why not?"

"I love you too much."

"Love me! No. Once you loved me, but now you cannot love me, or I should not experience the cruel treatment at your hands which is bringing me to my grave," she said reproachfully.

"I beseech you to believe," he exclaimed, "that your death would be to me the signal for my own. I could not exist without you."

With a mournful movement of the head, Mabel sighed, and raising the water to her lips, drank off the contents. Horace Brady breathed a sigh of intense relief. The deed was done; now for the consequences. The apothecary had told him that the effects would not be fully apparent for twenty-four hours, and that the last male person the patient saw before imbibing the potion would be the one upon whom the transport of her newly-born affections would fall. Everything, then, was done as well as it could be. The rest must be left to time and chance. Horace informed her that he would take her request for liberty into consideration.

"If," said he, "you are in the same mind in four and-twenty hours that you now are, I will yield to your wishes in every respect. This suspense must be ended one way or another."

Mabel thanked him, and he withdrew. As may be imagined, he was in the utmost anxiety to know how the potion would affect her. He cared not if she became imbecile, so long as she loved him; that was all he required.

The next day he abstained from going near her, though he inquired of her attendants if they noticed any change in her. Their reply was that, with the exception of increased drowsiness, she was unaltered. When the twenty-four hours were fully expired, Horace sought Mabel's apartments. He found her lying asleep on a sofa, dressed in charming *déshabille*

“ Mabel, my darling Mabel !” he exclaimed.

She started up, and looked wildly around her, pressing her hand to her forehead, as if trying to recall the scattered fragments of a dream.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED EFFORT.

It appeared to Horace Brady that Mabel recognised him with difficulty, but when she did recognise him she stretched out her arms, and said,

“ My darling has come to me ! ”

He flew to her side.

“ What did I say ? ” she asked presently.

“ You said you loved me,” he replied.

“ Loved you ! I said that I loved *you* !—ha, ha, ha ! ”

A wild peal of weird, unearthly laughter rang through the room, which chilled the blood of him who listened to it.

“ Great God,” he said in a low voice, between a sob and a sigh, “ she is indeed mad ! ”

Presently he was roused from his grief by Mabel, who exclaimed,

“ Kiss me, dearest ! Look at me ; I must see your loved face—do not turn away from me. Kiss me, kiss me ! O, if you only knew how I longed for your dear kisses ! ”

He got up from his recumbent position, and bent over her to comply with her request. Before his lips could touch hers, she pushed his face away with her open hands.

"No, no!" she cried, exhibiting every symptom of disgust. "Do you want to frighten me with your hideous visage? I would rather embrace a blackamoor!"

Horace Brady turned away with a shudder.

"You do not recognise me, dearest," he said. "You confuse me with some other person."

"O, my poor head!" she answered, pressing her forehead as before. "When will they lay me in my sepulchre by the sea, in my tomb by the sounding sea? I am Annabel Lee; your Annabel, dearest Horace: the Annabel you used to love so much."

"No, you are Mabel. To me you will always be Mabel," he rejoined.

"Ah, yes; you are right. It is the song I am confusing with something else. What is the matter with my poor head, Horace? can you tell me? Sometimes everything is so clear, and I revel in the consciousness of loving and being loved by you; then comes a black cloud and blots it all out."

"It will pass away, darling," he said.

"Will it?" she replied with a bright smile: "I know it must, if you say so."

"It is all clear now, is it not, dearest?"

"Quite clear. Give me your hand; I want you near me. I feel very weak and ill, dearest. Would you be grieved to lose me?"

"Do not talk so gloomily," said Horace Brady, whose eyes were full of tears. "You little know the strength of my affection, if you think I could survive you."

"You are so good, so kind!" she exclaimed, pat-

ting him on the cheek with her hand; adding, "How long have we loved one another?"

"A long time, darling."

"A long time? Shall we not be married soon? Did you not ask me to be your little wife? I think I remember. Do not mock me with a cruel delay, dear. Something tells me I shall not live long; and I should like to die with the consciousness of knowing that I am yours."

"To-morrow, my pet, to-morrow we will be made man and wife," he answered; "since you wish it, no delay shall occur."

"So we are to be married to-morrow! Why do people marry? I wonder why."

"Because they love one another."

"Is that it? But I do not love you; no, not one bit. Then why should I marry you?" she said, still looking at him earnestly, but so, so wildly.

Horace felt as if his heart would break.

"O, cursed apothecary," he cried in a loud, wailing voice full of a huge grief, "would to God that thou hadst been dead before I had met with thee!"

"O, that a man whom I love with all my heart and soul should speak so cruelly to me!" she cried. "I cannot bear it; he will have his wish—it will kill me—I shall die."

The next day the idea was still in her head, and she received him coldly. He, scarcely knowing what to do for the best, asked her if she would go for a drive.

It was early when they started in a handsome phaeton drawn by a pair of magnificent horses which

would have made a sensation in any park or public place in Europe. Horace Brady resolved to drive to Bristol, stay there one night, and return to the Priory the following day.

It was late when they arrived at Bristol, and the horses were much fatigued. Horace Brady stayed at an old-fashioned hotel, ordered dinner, and was pleased to see Mabel a little less melancholy.

She was very affectionate, kissed him at parting to go to her bedroom, and promised to be up early, as he had undertaken to show her the beauties of Clifton.

Horace called upon a friend of his in Bristol, an old college acquaintance, who was a curate in a poor district, and asked him if he would solemnise a marriage for him on the morrow, in the quietest possible manner, without display or ceremony of any sort.

"There will be only the bride and bridegroom," he said.

"O yes. Get the license, and I will do the rest willingly," replied the curate.

Mabel on the ensuing day did not fail to remind him of his promise to take her to Clifton. He thought he had never seen her look so lovely. As they walked along, he looked lovingly at her and said, "Soon, Mabel, we shall be man and wife."

"No; you wish me dead," she replied. "You cannot marry a woman whom you hate so much."

"My pretty child," he answered, "I do not hate you. I love you with all my heart."

"I am not to be deceived," she persisted; "you wish me dead. You told me so. And perhaps I

shall be dead sooner than you expect. Yet I do not wish to die; I am very happy. I live in the present. I have no past. The past is a sealed book to me, and the future—what is my future, dear Horace?"

"A happy one, be assured, dearest," he replied.

An agreeable walk brought them to the pleasant town of Clifton, and they went on the bridge, that marvellous work of art which seems to defy nature by its large span and wonderful altitude. Mabel leant over the parapet and regarded the tiny, sluggish stream beneath with some attention.

"What a height!" she exclaimed. It makes me quite dizzy."

"Come away, dear," said Horace Brady.

"Why should I? You wish me dead; I heard you say so," she answered, adding quickly, "Look, Horace, who is that behind you? See!"

He turned round to see who it might be standing behind him, but to his astonishment could discern no one. A terrible suspicion crossed his mind. With the quickness of lightning he resumed his former position.

CHAPTER XXX.

ALL OVER.

MABEL was making an effort to climb over the railings, and throw herself into the river. The potion made up by the apothecary had certainly disordered her mind. Whether the injury would be lasting or not, was another thing.

Horace Brady seized her by the arm, and a struggle ensued.

He shouted loudly for the help of the toll-keeper, who ran to his assistance. He was obliged to lean partly over the parapet in order to restrain the mad efforts of Mabel to destroy herself.

Just as the toll-keeper came up, Mabel had fainted, and rolled insensible in the roadway.

The sudden jerk caused by loosening her hold upon Horace Brady caused him to lose his balance.

He fell backwards, and in his descent to the river struck one of the piers, fracturing his skull.

Two hours afterwards he was picked up dead by some men who went in search of the body.

Mabel was handed over to the police, and by the advice of the divisional surgeon sent to the County Lunatic Asylum, where she remained some weeks.

In the course of time the baneful effects of the pernicious herb-potion the apothecary had given Horaec

Brady, and which she had taken, began to wear off, and she was discharged as cured.

Returning to London she was welcomed like one who had been much missed, and she achieved new triumphs.

Many people asked her where she had been, but she would not give any account of herself; indeed, she scarcely knew. She thought she had been driven mad by Horace Brady's treatment, for she knew nothing of his bargain with the apothecary.

The fate of the unhappy young man who had loved her so wildly was related to her; and though she shuddered when she thought of it, she soon appeared to forget him amidst the ever-changing gaieties of London and Paris life.

While ill in the country her father had died, and so changed was she, that she heard of his decease without a pang. He had done little to merit her love, and she did not weep for his loss.

She constantly wore a massive gold cross, and whenever any one asked her who presented her with it, she said, "A man named Horace Brady gave it me."

Perhaps she had not altogether forgotten him in her solitary moments. Most women allow the presence of the living to jostle out of mind the memory of the dead. Mabel Gray might have been an exception to the rule, but we do not assert it as a fact, as our faith in the tender recollection of women is not of the highest possible order.

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